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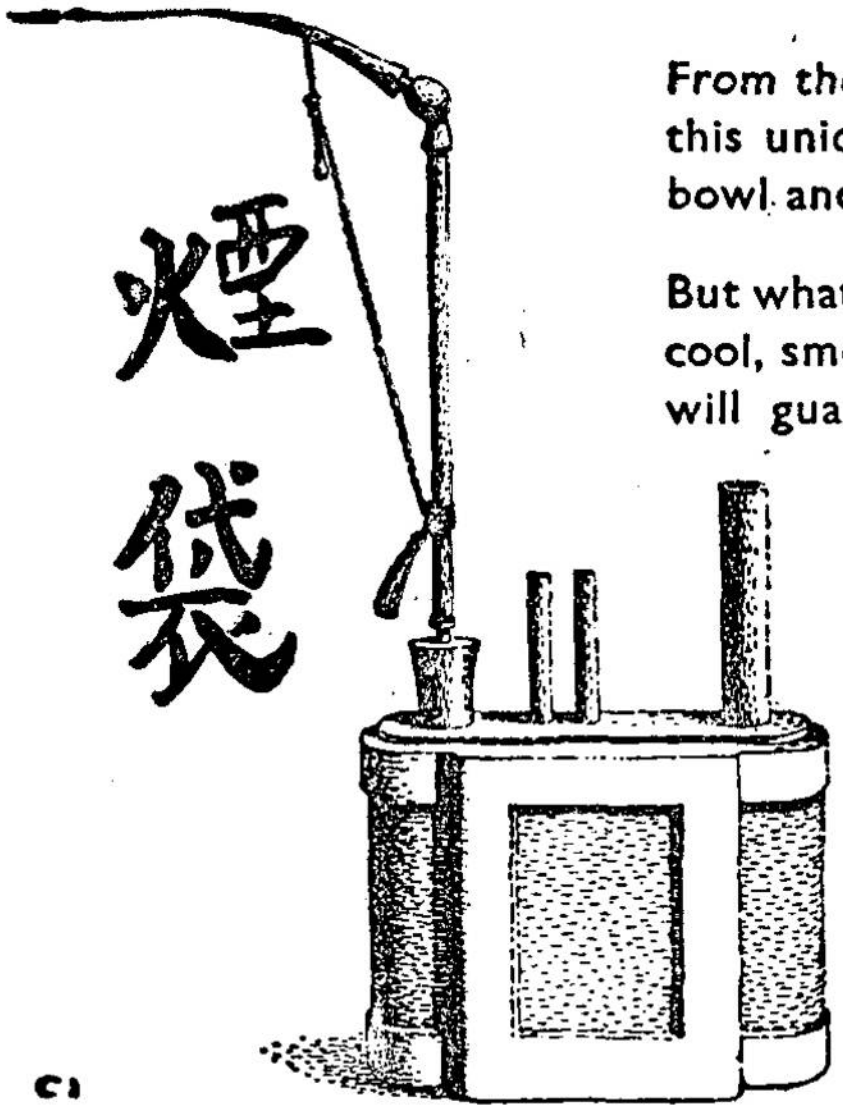

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BTI

ARGOSY

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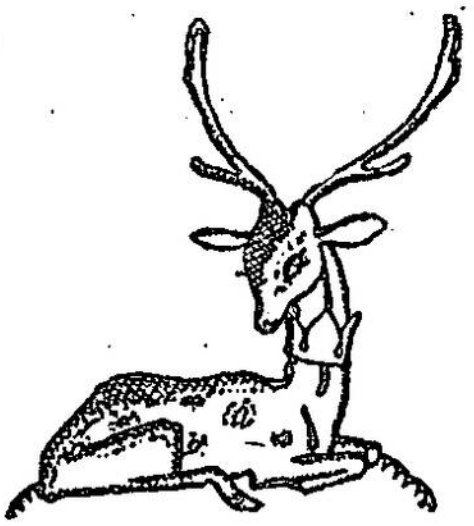
Pied Beauty

GLORY be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow ;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim ;

Fresh fire-coal chestnut-falls ; finches' wings ;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough ;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange ;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how ?)
With swift, slow ; sweet, sour ; adazzle, dim ;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change :
Praise Him.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS



HENRIETTA'S WEDDING

Nothing but an act of God would make her change her mind

by KATE THOMPSON

"THERE'S marriage in the air!" said Sophia van Riebeek rolling over in the big Zutphen fourposter and twitching the sheet away impudently from its carefully hitched coverage of Abram van Riebeek's mouth. Ever since the Boer War, Abram had slept with the sheet over his mouth. The habit came of camping out by night in the veld when you never knew what thousand-legged creatures might crawl into your mouth if you didn't cover it up.

Sophia was being skittish. As usual she had wakened early. Five o'clock in the summer time was her usual time, and the moment she woke she began to prod Abram until he got up and lit the kitchen fire and brought her a cup of hot coffee back to bed. By the time the coloured Zutphen servants rolled down the ladder from their loft, a big pan of coffee was steaming up for them on the stove.

Sometimes Abram even went so far as to step into the yard and clatter an iron spike against the harrow disc conveniently swinging in the wild-fig tree, just to let them know their coffee was ready. They came down sleepily, buttoning pinafores and poking away the ears of the cotton *doeke* they wore tied over their heads. Abram went back to bed.

There was never any haste in the Zutphen household now. All the sons and daughters had married long ago, and the grandchildren were just growing up. It would be some years yet before the new crop of babies began and by then, just possibly, Abram and Sophia might not be there to start another holiday nursery at Zutphen. The house and the wine-farm, named after the massacre the Spanish Duke of Alva had perpetrated during the William of Orange wars, would pass to Abram's eldest son, Hannes, who himself had no son.

His only daughter, Henrietta, was a small wild-eyed slip of a girl who never in this world could be expected to run a wine-farm. She was marrying, anyway, on Saturday, a creditable, up-and-coming young man from Paarl. He had a motor-business that flourished but was so far removed from the witchery of wine-growing that no help for the future of Zutphen could be expected

there, which was a pity because the site of the farm was magnificent. It lay in the rising angle of the Constantia valley looking over olive and poplar groves, vineyards, misty flats and marshes, to the blue wedge of False Bay and beyond that to the pink and silver dawn-flushed peaks of the Helderberg, frail as pointed petals against the early sky.

Sophia could see the mountains from the big bed. She often sat and looked at them while Abram was downstairs making coffee, judging the day's promised weather from their morning state of clarity or fog.

"By the time Henrietta gets here this afternoon," she was thinking, "the wind will be blowing again! I get tired of the wind! But not of Henrietta!" She gathered her hands together in a little pressing, cherishing gesture, touched by joy at the thought that her most blessed of all the grandchildren was coming to Zutphen that afternoon. The child had been down to Paarl to pay a little visit of goodwill to her in-laws before the wedding on Saturday.

"And we'll all go to Henrietta's wedding," Sophia began to sing, "and we'll all have a wonderful time!"

Abram found her singing in bed, playing an imaginary piano on the white quilt that covered her knees. She reached out a hand for her coffee-cup, holding it high in the air to keep it steady while Abram crawled back into bed. He had the fat book of the Bailey report on South Africa tucked under his arm and he proposed to spend the next hour studying it.

"Be quiet!" he said, gently, arranging the book, the coffee-cup, his spectacles.

"Keep still!" countered Sophia. "I'm getting up!" She got out carefully and left him to his reading.

Abram and his books! Books, books, books, all over the house. They filled the study and the lobby downstairs and overflowed into the playroom. Law books, philosophy, history, economics, in English, German, Dutch. Plenty in Afrikaans, too. Little slim modern books with wide spacing to the print. When she looked back it seemed that Abram had been reading all their married life, but even so, the peak of his reading hadn't been reached till the last hectic elections found the Nationalists suddenly in possession of the Government.

Abram might then just as well have glued his spectacles to his nose. He found himself surrounded by an avalanche of neglected pamphlets, surveys, reports, any of which might contain information vital to this new situation in South Africa that was stirring up comment all over the world.

"Trying to be as wise as Solomon!" Sophia complained, but her eyes were bright and her smile was wide. She always had

looked on Abram as a kind of elder statesman. Even now that he had given up politics he was always being asked to sit on this or that Board or Committee to advise, advise, advise about things as remotely different as the selection of British immigrants, African Trade Unions, and recruiting for the Post Office!

The only thing he hadn't seemed able to advise on was Henrietta's wedding. Of the whole vociferous van Riebeek family, only Abram had kept silent about that, just when his opinion was most needed and one nod from Solomon would have simplified the whole thing.

So far, Sophia alone, against the protestations of the entire family, approved of Henrietta's choice. It would have been comfortable to have Abram declare himself on her side. But he wouldn't. He just looked owlishly over his spectacles and told her to leave it to Henrietta and when anyone mentioned the inheritance of Zutphen, he just turned his back and walked away. It was absurd that Zutphen should pass to a boy who ran a garage and tinkered with derelict motor-cars, and came down to see Henrietta on a great roaring motor-bike on which he sat like a demon in yellow goggles and a sheepskin cap with its ears folded back. Sophia loved the boy. Like everyone else, she called him "Satan" cheerfully, hoping the act of naming him might put a hoodoo on his devilry.

Satan Calder at twenty had been a despatch-rider in the Western Desert in World War II. Coming down one night from "Hell-Fire" Pass he had presented his despatches with hands that dripped blood.

"Did you stop one?" he was asked.

"No, sir!" He spread out his hands and looked at them with surprise. "Just the handlebars of my bike, sir. The road's a bit rough, sir!"

"You'd better let someone else do the return job, then."

"Oh, no, sir! Thank you, sir! It's my job, sir!" He saluted bloodily and went out.

"Get that boy back!" a voice yelled after him. "He can't go off with those bleeding hands! Get him back!"

There was a roar outside. Satan had gone. All his life he made his own laws and observed them in his own way. Sophia twitched a thin shoulder, thinking about what she privately called Satan's "incandescence," the strange, burning thing inside him that lit up everything he did, illuminating, in passing, the lives of his friends, illuminating with perfect grace the shy life of her beloved Henrietta for whom Sophia could wish no lovelier fate than that she should be mated with this boy. And yet they all complained.

What did they want for Henrietta? A dumb-bell? Sophia, so thin now, that her arms were sticks inside her cotton dress, scratched at her thin, grey hair with a comb.

It was an old bone comb with wide teeth, out of the Ark, unbreakable, so frailly used by Sophia that it would last the rest of her life. She set it down on the bare top of her dressing-chest. There were no fripperies there, no mirrors, brushes, beautifying things. Sophia was a plain Boer woman of agile intelligence and quick wit and great, naïve charm and though her daughters had achieved almost notorious elegance and her grand-daughters were among the loveliest girls at the Cape, Sophia's only aid to beauty was a scrubby face-cloth and the white bone comb.

She had learnt austerity in a concentration camp during the Boer War—the English War, as the Boers called it. But she had not learnt bitterness. Her greatest friend, a Scottish girl, Isa Macfarlane, had been right through the siege of Mafeking. So that was tit for tat. What one side could suffer, the other side could suffer also. You didn't need Solomon to teach you that. And in the end, in World Wars I and II, her sons and grandsons had fought for the British against other enemies, making a common fight for something greater than themselves.

It was all one in the end. The British had decorated Satan Calder for conspicuous gallantry, and Satan was marrying Henrietta, an English boy marrying an Afrikaner girl—no wonder the family roared!

But they roared for an odd reason, not because they objected to Satan's being English but because they had an almost gospel belief in the old saying that a man who goes out from his own people finds no peace. They argued that Satan would get bored with being a stranger in the family and that when he got bored the devil would find a peck of mischief for him to do. Sophia argued that a little mischief of this Satan's particular brand would do their smug complacency no harm.

"You're all too comfortable!" she told Henrietta's mother, Leonie. "A bomb in your middle would brighten you up!" Bomb it was, indeed, when Henrietta told them shyly, mildly, that nothing but an act of God would make her change her mind. The wedding would be in December, on a summer day, at Zutphen, of course.

Now Sophia had all the work of the wedding on her hands, beds for fifty-three people to be arranged for. Abram had promised the old tent-wagon for the five boys to sleep in in the yard. Seven could sleep on each of the front and back balconies.

Zutphen was not a Colonial-Dutch house. Its architect was a German working for the first Zutphen van Riebeek and his North-

German fantasies had equipped it with turrets like candle-snuffers —only two, thank goodness!—wooden balconies and indoors a huge panelled hall with a stair winding round into a minstrels' gallery where the orchestra would play for Henrietta's wedding while the guests were received in the square hall below. It was a huge house, its thirty odd rooms rambling like a warren over four floors. In the old days there was usually a baby in a pram parked away somewhere in silence for its morning sleep, or a student sitting scratching at a notebook out of reach of the family. You could hide in Zutphen easily and the mystical German had given it seven entrances which meant, equally, seven escapes.

That may have been the secret of the van Riebeek family's rather special trait of freeness and the seed of Henrietta's own strength of mind which made her feel, equally, free to do as she pleased about Satan Calder provided she knew what she was about. She called him Lucifer herself. It sounded more enchanting and somehow, to her imagination, had a hint of stars. Fallen angels, perhaps? Who cared? Satan—Lucifer—Devil—could take care of himself. When he roared up Zutphen's long, slanted avenue of old oaks at night, even the shadows stood back.

Henrietta had said she would carry white lilac and lilies on her wedding day, and that she would not wear a veil.

"What then?" Sophia demanded.

"Something else. I'll see. Veils make nuns. Yes, even wedding-veils! It's the shape of the stuff pulling down on your head. No wife of Lucifer dare look like a nun!"

Remembering, Sophia caught her breath for the joy of first love and all the pain and terror and delight of it, closing her eyes for a moment on a lusty vision of the two of them. Love, as love should be. She slid her feet into a pair of laced, blue canvas shoes that her daughter, Lilias, insisted were called espadrilles. "Tackies," Sophia called them. It was easier. Abram was coughing again.

"Where are my *hoes bon-bons*?" he called out impatiently. Sophia fetched the flat little box of throat pastilles, kissed him good-morning and went downstairs. Zutphen was open to all the morning sunlight and there was a rushing of sweeping brooms and flapping dusters everywhere.

Henrietta, jogging down from Paarl in the morning mail-train, was happy about her visit to the in-laws. They had liked her as much as she liked them. What she noticed most was their quiet English way of saying nothing about anything important but just letting it be assumed that Henrietta and Roderick, as they rather primly called him, knew their own way into their own future,

which only they could probe.

Lucifer was silent, too, about important things. Things like the Zutphen inheritance which surely must trouble him but which he never spoke of, believing, perhaps, as Henrietta herself believed, that big things are in the hands of God and little meddling will not guide them. He never spoke, either, about his Englishness, and he had never once said a word to Henrietta about young Jodie de Villiers who for two years had been his rival for her heart. There was a silent space in their dealings with each other which Jodie inhabited stealthily. For Henrietta, Jodie was the only small sorrow in her otherwise blessed happiness. For Satan, Jodie was a pain in the neck.

For two years Jodie, a solicitor at Paarl, had tried to sabotage every movement of Satan Calder's, cramping him, watching him, trying, it seemed, to get him to the gallows or some other hell-touched place before he could marry Henrietta. To Satan it was like living with a policeman. If he parked his car ten minutes too long in the main street, he was fined. If he leaned his bike against the wrong kerb, he was fined. If he forgot to get his Income Tax forms in, or register a new mechanic, or check the sale of car, a bobby whirled round on a bicycle and worried him.

Jodie was like a private eye, watching him all the time. When he wanted to do anything really private he had to go away to another town and even then, if he ran into Jodie back home again, Jodie with a sly smile would tell him just what he had been doing in the other place. Murder would be done in the end, Satan sometimes felt, but not by Jodie. By Satan himself.

Jodie was a tall, smooth man with a very short neck, difficult to hang him by! His teeth were very white, showing in small seeded rows when he smiled the smile that had a sneer at its corner. He was not popular in the town, but being an Afrikaner he was at home among his own people whereas Satan was the stranger in their midst.

Jodie wasn't popular at Zutphen either. The family tolerated him because of his really touching affection for Henrietta, knowing they could leave the rest to Satan who had his own way of dealing with obstreperous obstacles.

Henrietta herself showed him kindness and often more consideration than she needed because he seemed so set on her. "Give him time," she said. "He'll forget me and afterwards he and Lucifer will be friends."

Satan snorted at that. Paarl could not hold the two of them much longer. Satan would have to see to that.

Henrietta came to Zutphen in the early afternoon, stopping in

Cape Town for shopping on her way. Sophia opened wide arms and gathered her in.

"Little love!" she clucked. "They haven't sent your dress yet. Could your mother let me have a dozen more sheets?"

"She's coming over in the morning with everything. Can she stay the week, do you think? There's a lot to do. Pappie's away in Pretoria. He'll be back on Friday night. May she come?"

"Of course." Everybody could come. Zutphen could hold them all, and more than all. Zutphen, already stirring and stretching itself ready for its crowded hour, was equal to anything. "What are you wearing on your head?"

"Something." Henrietta was not telling. "You'll see when the dressmaker brings my dress on Friday. Ouma, it's *sweet*!"

No one, not even Henrietta, knew about the little tin box of books Satan kept under his bed. He even locked the box and he fancied sometimes that this must surely be the only secret in his life that he had successfully kept from the prying eye of Jodie de Villiers. He opened the box at night, on the evenings when he didn't go down to see Henrietta at Zutphen, and his mother, coming in with a cup of tea for him at bedtime would find him reading at the bare table under the window with his head propped in his hands and his feet curled round the legs of his chair. Mechanics, again, she would suppose, thinking of Satan's absorption in the inner works of motor-cars, never thinking to look and find out for herself that the books he read so passionately were not about motor-cars at all.

They were about wine. Vine-growing, viticulture, wine-making, and all the subtle bits and pieces of knowledge that went with this ancient, aristocratic, intriguing art. Satan was preparing himself for whatever part of the burden of Henrietta's future might fall on him.

Beyond the patient, secret studying he had two other secret plans. One was to go to Elsenburg for a course in wine-making, if he could slip Jodie de Villiers for once. The other was to buy, for himself, a small wine-farm somewhere in the Cape Peninsula, near to Zutphen, so that he could set about the business of learning his future in earnest.

So far he had only found one property that seemed as if it would do. It was a part of an old, derelict farm adjoining Belle Ombre, owned now by an antique and disinterested widow who had no sons or future of her own.

The auction was to take place on the farm on Thursday morning, two days before Henrietta's wedding, and Satan intended to be there. Afterwards he planned to call at Zutphen for lunch and to

spend a little time with Henrietta before Friday's pre-wedding preparations swallowed her up.

It was her aunt, Adie van Riebeek, who had designed Henrietta's wedding-dress and the piece of nonsense that was to substitute for the rejected nun-like veil. All of Adie's own beauty was in her face and the tilt of her head. The rest of Adie was fat. Monumental, uncontrollable fat that had a certain humour when it belonged to someone so young and yet was emphasized by her slim, exquisite ankles and feet and the really beautiful, petal-like contours of her face.

Adie rarely looked at herself in a full-length mirror. She was content with her face and because years of struggle had taught her how to make the most of her one beauty, she knew all there was to know about putting up hair, make-up, and things to wear on your head. Henrietta simply sat down in a chair and let Adie experiment.

" You must have your hair sleek, like an old Flemish picture, like your mother's, drawn back and polished as bright and shining as pomegranate seeds. It will lift your eyes up at the corners and that will suit Mister Satan because it will give you a look of mischief ! Then a wound-up bun in the back, out of sight, under the tulle. Like this ! "

Henrietta looked at herself in the mirror, saw an oval face with slanted brows, deep, beautiful, pansy-dark eyes, and a straight little nose. She smiled. Lucifer would like her like that.

" And I will lend you my pearl and diamond ear-rings. Something borrowed—and don't you lose them ! Pearls go with lilac. Satan's a lucky boy ! "

" Do you think so, Adie ? The family mostly seem to think he's the Jonah and do you know what Jodie said ? That Satan was a fool to marry out of his own class ! "

" Class ! Class ! What class have we—or they—or any of us ? Jodie ! " Adie could not say the name without scorn.

" Perhaps I am the fool to let him." Henrietta was briefly sad. " English people seem to be so much older than we are, as if their minds have more finish, as if they have lived so long that they know everything ! "

" Don't you believe it. Some of them are just as clumsy as the worst of us. Satan's a lucky boy. Lift up your head ! " Adie went on brushing, lovingly, and the doubt in Henrietta's heart was momentarily stilled.

Her mother, Leonie, had little to say. Pale-skinned, dark-haired, smooth as an Old Dutch picture, she was one of the quiet van Riebeeks, deferring most of her opinions to those of her vigorous husband, Hannes, who was up in Pretoria on Government business and who would rush home on Friday for the wedding and

then rush off again. If any comment or protest had been required, Hannes would have made it long before this. But Henrietta, suddenly disquieted by her doubts, came asking questions again and again.

"Lucifer might be lonely with all of us. What do you think?"

Leonie answered quietly, "If he thought he would be lonely he wouldn't have asked you, would he? If he'd wanted to marry an English girl there are plenty at the Cape. Millions of them!"

Henrietta took her problem to Sophia. "Ouma! Ouma! Am I right? Am I wrong?"

"You must listen to your heart, child, not to other people. Listen to your heart!"

All brides, it seemed, had moments of panic just before the wedding day. To Henrietta it seemed worse than panic. It was the deadliest fear, all twisted up with her love for Lucifer, that she might be bringing her love to sorrow, to discontent, to loneliness. If he had been a wine-farmer, she pondered, it might have been easier. Inheriting Zutphen would have compensated him. But as it is—I should feel terrible if I married an Englishman in England. I should get so tired of always talking English, hearing English, thinking English, and trying to have English ideas and English manners. I'd be bored stiff!

Henrietta went and sat beside Abram in the garden, hoping some of his sagacity would communicate itself to her. It wasn't too late yet. It was never too late till the last minute. Even now, she could put it off and set Lucifer free.

"Bunkum!" said Abram, crustily. "Go away!"

Satan, unaware of Henrietta's panicking, was out early that Thursday morning. In his clothes, as in everything else, he achieved the distinction of difference. His corduroy trousers were quite ordinary. The old Afrikaans *takhaar* farmers had worn them long before they caught on with the Army in the Western Desert. His rough suede *veldschoens* were ordinary, too. But with these he wore a grey flannel shirt which he insisted kept the heat out, a dotted-cotton blue bow-tie and a jacket of bleached drill cut long with two slits at the back.

He went across to the Post Office to post his letter to Elsenburg about the wine-course, and ran into Jodie at the door. Jodie in a dark blue pin-striped lawyer's suit, with a rather high white shirt-collar, looked prim and difficult as ever. Satan hid the address on the letter in his hand but he couldn't hide the holiday clothes he was wearing.

"Taking the day off?" Jodie asked amiably.

"Yep."

"Going over to Zutphen?" Jodie tipped his nose, questioningly, into the air.

"If you say so!"

Jodie made no comment but his sliding glance was more than curious. It was so calculatingly inquisitive that he watched Satan all the way back across the street to his garage, watched him get on to his bike, watched him ride away. Then Jodie nipped round the corner to his own car and followed him.

Heading for Belle Ombre and the auction, Satan began to sing. December was settling at last to real summer. The wheatfields were ripe, the vineyards blue with grapes, the beautiful Paarl mountains already hazed over with the shimmer of heat. There were great white daisies in drifts beside the road and arums, pure and white, where the grass ran into marshy reeds. The wind flew past Satan's demon-goggled head whipping his song away. "And we'll all go to Henrietta's wedding . . ."

The tune was so gay. It was so expressly right for the way he felt about everything. Nothing in the world could make him happier. Nothing, it seemed, could make him sad. He had no idea that Jodie was following nor any premonition of the bitterness the end of that day would bring.

It was only as he walked under the Belle Ombre oaks that he realized how important the auction sale was to him. It might change his whole life. If he bought the land he wanted that would be the first step towards selling his business and moving from Paarl to Constantia where he could make a home for Henrietta close to Zutphen and the van Riebeek family he already loved. He loved them for their simplicity, their unaffectedness, their ready loyalty to each other and their extraordinary kindness to a man who could only seem an English stranger to them, in spite of their host of English friends.

Hannes van Riebeek's official position had always demanded a wide social circle. Never at any time in his friendship with the family had Lucifer felt left outside. The van Riebeeks knew everybody, went everywhere. The warmth of their friendliness spread out a long, long way. As much as any of the family, Satan loved Zutphen.

Son of a Kentish farmer exiled to Africa because of ill health, he had grown up loving land and trees, apple orchards, hop gardens, the cold crunch of sweet cherries in his mouth. The garage at Paarl had been a necessary interlude. Very soon it could be dispensed with and real life begin again.

He walked in amongst the knot of men standing in front of the Belle Ombre homestead, each with his sale notice in his hand,

looking about him carefully to see what sort of bidders there would be. Dealers, probably. Much of the Constantia land was being turned over to building plots. The old vineyards that had grown wine for centuries were being carved up. Competition would be sharp, the last price high. Satan was well-prepared. He knew that he could match any but an extravagantly exorbitant bid. He spun round on his heel, interested, keen, and saw Jodie de Villiers climbing out of his car.

He thought at first that Jodie had come just out of curiosity, till the bidding began and after an exasperatingly slow start he suddenly realized that he and Jodie were the main bidders with one other man, a stranger, pushing up with them till the price was gaspingly high.

Satan shut his eyes and prayed. He knew how far he could go without being foolish. He had a sudden vision of his whole future if Jodie bought this land almost on the boundary of Zutphen, near enough to be a constant and perpetual torment to Henrietta and himself.

He nodded again and again. There were sly smiles from the crowd. The stranger, the third man, dropped out and Jodie de Villiers drew closer, pressing in, it seemed, to closer advantage. Satan had passed his limit. He knew he was only cutting capers by bidding on. He was just on the point of dropping out, in despair, when a crisp voice jumped the bidding sharply. Both Jodie and Satan turned round, astonished, and while they stared the auctioneer dropped his hammer and the deal was closed.

Satan had not seen the man before. He had apparently been standing behind him, a stocky, broad-shouldered stranger wearing an Englishman's tweed cap and carrying a knotty stick. He didn't even stay to hear the closing gossip and learn this stranger's name. He yanked his bike off its stand and roared away to Zutphen in a fiendish temper, wanting only the sweetness and mildness of Henrietta near him to ease his sharp despair.

Once again, Jodie de Villiers had thwarted him, running the bidding up like that till a stranger, sensing some hidden value, had jumped in. Once again Jodie's spite had touched him. This would have to be the last time. Savage, sullen, he rode up the Zutphen drive to find Henrietta in the garden gathering baskets full of sweet peas.

She held the flowers under her chin and smiled at him, wondering why his fingers, when they clutched at her shoulders, had a funny, hard grip that hurt her so that she wriggled away, then came back again to lean against him and whisper, "Are you coming to Henrietta's wedding on Saturday?"

Satan grinned. "May I?"

"I think so!" She bobbed the flowers in his face so that the scent of them was closer even than she was, then ran away. "Pappie's here,'' she called over her shoulder. "He came back a day early. Business, or something. He's gone in to town."

Satan stayed for lunch, stayed all afternoon, following Henrietta about the house, drinking big cups of tea, helping Ouma fix the tent-wagon that the boys were going to sleep in, waiting for his father-in-law to come home so that he could pay his respects before the wedding, talking boyishly to Leonie who suddenly felt maternal about the wedding.

"You're sure about it, Lucifer, aren't you?" she pleaded. "We wouldn't want you to regret! Henrietta's afraid you may get bored being pitchforked suddenly into a very voluminous, Afrikaans family like ours."

"Henrietta's *afraid*? When did she tell you that?"

Leonie looked shy. "I guessed it," she said, quickly. "We—we—talk about you sometimes. You see—"

Satan had walked away. So there was doubt about him in their minds.

"Did Jodie de Villiers ever say anything about it?" he shouted back suddenly. "Did he?"

"Why—" Leonie spoke too quickly in her astonishment. "—yes, he did! He thought you might be sorry afterwards and not be happy. He wondered if you were wise!"

Satan had gone, stamping down the steps. He was muttering oaths that Leonie had never heard in her life. Terrified, she ran inside. Henrietta in tears ran to Ouma and Ouma went straight to Solomon.

"I told you not to meddle!" he roared. "Where's Hannes? Why isn't he home?"

It took Satan four hours to find Jodie. Then he beat him up. It wasn't a one-sided fight. The two men were matched in size and equal passion and the suppressed venom of years. They finished up in a ditch at the bottom of a Paarl garden, bleeding and exhausted, and only Satan's pride gave him strength to crawl out of it and get himself home.

At Zutphen there was panic. When Hannes van Riebeek came home he found the women crying and Ouma flapping about like a bat. "You must telephone him, Hannes! Tell him Leonie was only being cautious, that we're pleased, proud, oh, tell him, Hannes. The child's having hysterics and Abram's like a mad bull!"

Hannes went to the telephone. There was no reply from the number at Paarl.

On the Friday morning, that should have been the day of greatest

preparation, there was silence in the house. Henrietta, exhausted, refused to come down from her room. Even the imperturbable Adie went without her breakfast. The florist's van arrived, unwelcomed, was emptied and sent away. Abram couldn't read his paper. Ouma had hiccups for twenty minutes. Hannes sat in his study looking like a graven image, furious and silent, staring angrily at the impotent telephone.

"Someone will have to go down to Paarl," he told them.

"No!" Henrietta shrieked. "I won't have you beg him. If he doesn't want to marry me—"

Into the hubbub the inert telephone abruptly shrilled. It was Satan, sounding very mild, almost sleepy, asking in his quietest voice, "What have you done with the ring? I left it with Ouma. Someone will have to remember to give it to my friend, Charlie, or we won't have it at the wedding, and then we'll be sunk."

Zutphen turned over and yawned like a big dog waking from sleep.

"*Tot siens*, Henrietta!" whispered Satan, ringing off.

It was then that Hannes remembered his surprise. "I bought that land next to Belle Ombre," he told his father. "You see, Leonie and I are a bit old to take over Zutphen, don't you think? We thought it might be an idea to let the boy, Lucifer, and Henrietta have it. The boy's keen, you know. He's been swotting up viticulture all on his own. His friend, Charlie Hastings, told me. He'll have to train for it, of course. It's a big job, bigger than I'd care to tackle at my time of life. But when you and Ouma don't want to be bothered any more, you can be glad you've got someone to carry on for you. Leonie wants to build a cottage on the new land and grow table grapes only. It's good land. I sent an agent down to bid for it. He had to pay a hell of a price!"

Ouma had made up the last of the fifty-three beds. They would all be occupied on Saturday night. The dressmaker's box had come and Adie and Henrietta were shut away somewhere trying things on for the last time. Leonie was up in the gallery playing the piano while the four little flower-girls practised walking across the hall and carrying bouquets.

Zutphen had a long, long day ahead of it, and a longer one tomorrow, and after that a Sunday of complete contentment after the bride and Lucifer had gone.

Ouma even remembered the ring, slipping it to Charlie where he stood with Lucifer at the top of the Groote Kerk, so there was no doubt about that. And there, framed in sunlight in the great door of the church, was Henrietta. Her dress was filmy tulle, touched here and there with silver. The white lilac was in her

arms and on her head, deftly set there by Adie, was a wide tulle hat, very frail, very saucy, rather like the wide open cup of a flower framing the dark hair and the delicate, mischievous face.

She came up close to Lucifer, her eyes on his face. There was a broad strip of elastoplast across his nearest cheek. His nearest eye was faintly blue. Henrietta stood still.

"What happened to you?" she demanded, her voice quite audible so that everyone, intrigued by the plaster, listened intently for the answer.

Satan ducked his head in mock repentance. "I fell off my bike last night!"

Henrietta's answer was an equally mocking smile. Then she nodded sagely and slipped her hand on to his arm. The *predikant* lifted his forefinger from the open page of his prayer-book. Henrietta's wedding began.

* * *

off the record

the centipede adown the street
goes braggartly with scores of feet
a gaudy insect but not neat

the octopus s secret wish
is not to be a formal fish
he dreams that some time he may grow
another set of legs or so
and be a broadway music show

oh do not always take a chance
upon an open countenance
the hippopotamus s smile
conceals a nature full of guile

human wandering through the zoo
what do your cousins think of you

DON MARQUIS, *archy and mehitabe*

THE OAR

A raised, terrifying thing in the wild, enchanted light

by LIAM O'FLAHERTY

BENEATH tall cliffs, two anchored curraghs swung, their light prows bobbing on the gentle waves. Their tarred sides shone in the moonlight. In each, three stooping figures sat on narrow seats, their arms resting on the frail sides, their red-backed hands fingering long lines, that swam, white, through the deep, dark water.

There was a heavy silence there. There were strange shadows on the gently rolling bosom of the sea. The shadows came from the cliffs. Beyond, the Black Reef looked like a fallen spear, a clear black line with a pointed head. Above, the Drowned Man's Leap stood ; a proud cruel cliff with a jutting beak, from which water dripped down its bulging, mossy belly. And round the frail, swaying boats, other shadows crept up from the deep, shapes of sunken rocks, where fishes roamed in lairs and beds of clustering yellow weeds.

There were no fish. The lines, baited with heated limpets, wandered idly through the languid sea. Strange too, although the moon shone fitfully, she wandered alone through the sky. Not a star was seen. The sky had no colour. There was no end to the languid sea, no horizon to its endless rows of slowly rolling waves.

The men sat on their narrow seats in silence, fingering their lines. A little while ago, just before nightfall, an enormous school of bream had come about the boats. They rose like mackerel, even to the water's edge, and nosed the air, opening their gauzy red lips, like cormorants flying high in a breeze. As if terrified, they darted round the floating baits and nibbled at the lines. Each boat caught a couple and then they disappeared again. Dogfish came. The men were busy swiping the heads off the brutes with their knives and then throwing their carcases into the sea. Then the dogfish went away.

Excited by the enormous school of fish, the men waited now, although they did not get a bite. When the tide was full, they thought the fish would come again.

Their greed made them pay no heed to the ominous silence and to the starless sky that had no colour. If those fish came again, they would fill their boat with them.

Now the tide was full. It became very hot. A man with a short

red beard stood up in the prow of the boat farthest to the east. He tightened his belt round his waist. He coughed and shouted to the other boat:

"Are ye getting any bite, Little Martin?"

A voice coughed and answered:

"I think, Red Bartly . . . heh, I think now, that there is something to come out of that sky that has no colour in it, like a mist on a mountain."

"Aye," said Red Bartly. "Maybe. That black reef over there, look at it. Ye'd think it was a long fishing-rod held out that way. And yet, my soul from the devil, by day, it's as broad as a boat is long."

"Yes, yes," the men murmured. "Maybe we'd better pull up."

But nobody moved, for their greedy imaginations filled their boats again and again from the enormous school of red-lipped fish that had risen like a miracle about them.

Suddenly it became still more silent. As when lead melts and flows in a silver stream, all smooth, so the wavelets melted into the sea's bosom. Now a motionless black floor supported the motionless coracles. Now there was no moon. Now a black mass filled the sky. From afar a bellowing noise came and then a wave simmered over a smooth rock quite near. "Tchee . . . ee . . . ee," it said.

From each boat a wild cry re-echoed through the caverns of the mighty cliffs:

"In the name of God, cut. Cut. Oars out. Cut."

With teeth bared, Red Bartly bounded into the prow of the curragh. He gripped his open knife, blade downwards. With one fierce stroke he cut the hairy yellow anchor rope. The fragile coracle shivered like an eased horse eager for the road. With a gay twirl of her high prow, she swung about to the east. Already an oar was out astern.

"Haul in the lines," Red Bartly said.

"Damn the lines," the others growled. "Ha! What's that? Oh, heavens!"

Lightning flashed across the bellying sky, lightening the air with crooked knives of flame. Across its path, wild thunder crashed, reverberating. The leaden sea convulsed, swayed up the cliffs and moaned receding.

With loud cries, the two crews hammered their tholepins with sea-smoothed stones. Then they rowed, having knived their lines and their anchor ropes.

The oars cut the still-flat sea with a screeching sound. Red Bartly's curragh was in front. As they lay back, each crew hissed in unison. The whole strength of their wild hearts was in each stroke.

And the light black boats, arching their gay prows, bounded like leaping salmon over the sea.

They rowed eastwards beneath the towering cliffs. To east and west, within them, long reefs and bastions of jutting rock stood out, chiselled like housewalls by the might of ancient storms. Southwards the ocean stretched; now a sloping mountain that had no summit.

Now the silent lightning flashed regularly and thunder followed its shooting rays. The boats lit up, stood out, white and small, and then they passed with a rumbling swishing sound of moving oars again into the pitch-dark night.

When the lightning flashed on them the faces of the rowing men were white. But they no longer feared. They were fighting now and they murmured calmly as they rowed, wondering would they reach the rock-bound shore below their village before the sea rose in its fullness. The two boats rowed in a line, a few fathoms apart. And although it was pitch-dark, with ancient skill they kept them as straight as a rock-bird's flight, on the ancient course, along which their countless ancestors had rowed. They did not think. Every muscle of their bodies was taut with fierce courage.

Moving at great speed, the two boats reached the promontory of the fort. They passed it. Now they were coming abreast of the ancient fort of Aengus, perched on the cliff-top. Then the sea began to break. The wind came sweeping from the ocean, driving the sea before it. Then a loud cry came from the men.

"She's after us," they said.

They crossed themselves hurriedly. Then they became silent. The long rolling waves broke into fragments. They became alive. Froth overspread them. They hissed as they clashed and cast their spume into the air. Some swayed and wallowed, towering high. Others raced along, with curved summits, as if consciously fleeing before the wind.

The boats no longer bounded forward. They rocked now, swinging their sterns across each following wave. Now the men did not pull fiercely but cautiously. They measured out half and quarter strokes, saving their boats from the foam-capped, monstrous waves that jumped at them from out the lightning flashes.

Still they passed on, tumbling black specks, past the Swan's Cliffs until they were abreast of the great reef that runs west of the Serpent's Hole. There were breakers there; for though it was full tide, the power of the sea swept its waters back afar, exposing even the black weeds that grow in deep caverns. And over the low-tide rocks, giant and beautiful waves came rolling under a shower of fluttering foam.

Then indeed the men trembled in their boats. Red Bartly shouted out with all his might :

" Strengthen your right hands and keep your faces to the sea. Lay her out."

Now there was a sea in which heavy rocks could float.

They had to tack out into the wind. Blood burst from beneath their finger-nails and from their nostrils. The two curraghs, now quite close together, faced the sea with almost perpendicular prows. Their pointed beaks and rounded shoulders made them look like big black fish hauled quickly, resisting, over the surface of resisting water, from a distant high bank.

Then with a loud cry they turned again eastwards. Now the boats raced eastwards before the flying wind. They had gone a hundred fathoms when, lo ! a mighty wave arose. Lightning flashed on it and on the boats. It arose close behind Little Martin's. As the lightning flashed Red Bartly and his crew saw it standing like a falling cliff over Little Martin's boat. Then the lightning passed. Red Bartly turned to receive the wave. In a moment it was upon them. Its spume filled their boat to the transom. As it passed and their boat fell away in its wake, lightning flashed again in three successive flashes.

Then indeed they saw a terrifying thing in the wild, enchanted light that spread red over the black sea.

First they saw an upraised oar, raised straight on high, its handle grasped by an upraised hand. Beneath it, they saw an upraised face in agony. The face looked up, with staring eyes, as if saluting Heaven with the upraised oar.

Then darkness came.

Again the lightning flashed. Again they saw the oar, now hurled aloft sideways. There was no hand grasping its handle.

Again darkness came.

The third time the lightning flashed, they looked and saw nothing but a wall of sea approaching them.

" Turn and save them," cried one of Red Bartly's crew.

Red Bartly roared :

" Sense comes before courage. Three widows are enough. Row, you devils. Row."

They passed the jutting reef. They reached the harbour's mouth. Now they rowed steadily, making great way, through the rolling seas. Their eyes, against their cunning, life-loving wills, still pierced the darkness behind them.

They saw it once again, when lightning flashed, following them. The waves were tossing it. It stood like a mast and then fell, turning round and round, into the darkness.

Then they heard shouting on the shore.

Up among the wailing women they were dragged. Hands were about their necks and prayers of thanksgiving whispered on their kissed cheeks.

But other voices shrieked in despair.

Red Bartly kept repeating in a crazed voice :

" We saw an oar by the Serpent's Reef. Raised up to Heaven with a hand grasping it. It followed us and no hand was grasping it."

* * *

THE GAME'S THE THING

Sport—a serious matter in these islands, and its hazards the breath of life. Can you identify these literary diversions? Allow one point for recognising the sport, one for the characters, one for the source and one for the author. Forty points in all. If you score more than thirty you are worthy of the Chaplet of Honour. Answers are on page 117.

1. *A disinherited knight and a famous day's sport—six champions overcome and a Chaplet of Honour from a lovely lady for the victor.*
2. *This beautiful bride on her wedding night, weary of dancing, suggested a game in which fate played a cruel hand.*
3. *He certainly cut a figure, but it wasn't a figure of eight—and his friends soon knew him for a Humbug.*
4. *A rejected suitor and a young lady in a compromising predicament almost fought a duel.*
5. *Dame Fortune smiled upon this debonair young man who broke more than the ladies' hearts.*
6. *No aspirant to Olympic Honours, this slow-footed little creature challenged his long-eared tormentor to a race—and won.*
7. *Even in this topsy-turvy world where anything could happen, the use of live animals in this surprising game was disconcerting.*
8. *He told his inexperienced young friend it was one of the nicest things to mess about in, but his confidence did not prevent a slight mishap.*
9. *In sport he fashioned a lovely woman. He even taught her to speak the King's English—almost.*
10. *Would* you *recognise this grey-coated rider at break of day?*

THE LOTUS EATERS

I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours

JEROME K. JEROME

Hang work!

I wish that all the year were holiday; I am sure that indolence, —indefeasible indolence—is the true state of man, and business the invention of the old Teazer, whose interference doomed Adam to an apron and set him a-hoeing . . .

CHARLES LAMB, 1775-1834, *in a letter to Wordsworth*

Thought Has Ever Been My Foe

On the cabin-roof I lie
Gazing into vacancy.
Make no noise and break no jest,
I am peaceful and at rest.

Somewhere back in days gone by
I did something—was it I?
Do not ask: I have forgot
Whether it was I or not.

Sometime I may have to do
Something else; but so may you.
Do not argue, but admit
That we need not think of it.

Thought has ever been my foe;
That is so. Yes. That is so.
On the cabin-roof I lie
Gazing into vacancy.

A. H. SIDGWICK

Retired Artist

Tom appeared on the side-walk with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and the gladness went out of nature, and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of broad fence nine feet high!

. . . At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him. He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding dong dong . . . for he was personating the *Big Missouri*, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water . . .

Tom went on whitewashing—paid no attention to the steamer. Ben stared a moment, and then said:

"Hello, old chap; you got to work, hey?"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't that work? . . . Oh, come now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there—Ben watching every move, and getting more and more interested. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little."

Tom considered . . . "No, no; I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence . . ."

"Oh, shucks; I'll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say—I'll give you the core of my apple . . . I'll give you all of it."

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer *Big Missouri* worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents . . . By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite in good repair; and when he was played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with; and when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning Tom was literally rolling in wealth.

MARK TWAIN, 1835-1910, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

No Idle Thoughts

The Emperour Domitian (Right Honourable) made him nets to catch Flies, lest happily he might be found idle. Caligula being wearied with weightie affaires, would (to passe away the time) gather Cockles. The Persian Kings sometimes shaved stickes. Virgill chose rather to reade rude Ennius, then to be found without a Booke in his hand. Time wisheth rather to be spent in vaine toies, then in idle thoughts, the one driveth away fantasies, the other breedeth Melancholie.

ROBERT GREENE, 1560-1592,
Dedication to the Earl of Arundell in Morando

Variations on a Theme

In his chamber, weak and dying,
While the Norman Baron lay,
Loud, without, his men were crying,
'Shorter hours and better pay.'

Know you why the ploughman, fretting,
Homeward plods his weary way
Ere his time? He's after getting
Shorter hours and better pay.

E'en the boy upon the burning
Deck has got a word to say,
Something rather cross concerning
Shorter hours and better pay.

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make as much as they,
Work no more, until they find us
Shorter hours and better pay.

Hail to thee, blithe spirit! (Shelley)
Wilt thou be a blackleg? Nay.
Soaring, sing above the mêlée,
'Shorter hours and better pay.'

Author Unknown, Nineteenth Century

The Happy Life

Within a comparatively small area the Rome of the Antonines must have contained about 1,200,000 souls. Of these over one-third lived on public charity, with free baths as well as free bread and free circuses . . . . The working day of the artisan was only of six to seven hours, and there were already under Claudius 150 public holidays in each year, a number that rose to 200 in the fourth century. Even the slaves, I think, flourished . . . For as often as not they could acquire, from the gold perpetually pouring into the city, pickings enough to purchase their freedom and to become bourgeois.

RAYMOND MORTIMER, *Channel Packet*

Epitaph

He was an honest man and a good bricklayer.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VI*

MARY ANN AND THE DUKE

"All they gels hev to sleep wi' t'Duke?" breathed Will

by ERIC KNIGHT

THERE'S hardly a lad in all Polkingthorpe Bridge that hasn't run a rabbit or two in the Duke of Rudling's woods. This is done mostly at night—preferably a moonlight night. But Ian Cawper has the right to do so, and never a soul to halt him.

This right of Ian's came about in a most peculiar way. The story starts where most things start at Polkingthorpe, down at the *Spread Eagle.* The lads were at the inn one night, giving the international situation a bit of a going over. Sam Small was there, to explain the more knotty problems as they nursed their mugs of ale. Old Capper Wambley was by the fire reading the paper.

"Eigh, Ah'll be jiggered," the Capper said, suddenly. "That Ah will, indeed, and that's the trewth."

They considered his remark a while, and then asked him what was up.

"Why, lads," breathed the Capper, "it says here i' black and white that t'owd Duke o' Rudling's gate t'drewit de segner."

"Tha doan't mean it!" Tichie Helliwell said. "Eigh, now, if Ah'm not reight sorry to hear that."

"Ba gum, and him gating along i' years," Will Braithewaite added, consolingly.

"Indeed, he maun be gating along," old Tweksby agreed. "T' last time Ah seed him—maun ha' been ten, twelve year agoa—big gert strapping chap he were—but gating along even then. Eigh, it does seem a right mawngy shame him cooming down like that."

They clicked their tongues and made sympathetic noises.

"Just what is this here—what tha said?"

"T' drewit de segner?" Capper said, looking again at the paper. He scratched his head. "Tha knaws, if that ain't what's been bothering me, too. Sammywell, lad, what would t'drewit de segner be?"

"The drewit de segner?" Sam Small cleared his throat. "Well, lads. Ah'll explain it to ye. It's—er—let's see that theer paper, Capper."

The old man passed the paper over. Sam adjusted his glasses and read :

Among the many curious and ancient rights held by the Dukes of Rudling is that of the droit de seigneur throughout the six parishes of the Duchy.

" Oh, now Ah see," Sam said. " Ye mixed me oop by mispronouncing it, Capper. It's the drawit de saynoor. That's what it is."

" Eigh, is that what it is ? " the Capper breathed.

" Aye, that's it."

" Well, if it ain't fair amazing," old Tweksby put in, wagging his head.

" Aye, Sam, but what is it ? " Will Braithewaite insisted. The others nodded their heads.

" Well, Ah were just off to tell thee, Will," Sam said. " It's Latin—that's what it is."

They wagged their heads and clicked their tongues again.

" But what does it mean, Sam ? " Will persisted, stubbornly.

" Well, happen Ah can best explain it this way," Sam said. " Latin, as ye all may have heard tell, is a vary foony language."

" Aye, that it is," they agreed.

" Now," Sam went on, " one o' t' fooniest things abaht it is that one time it'll mean one thing, in a manner o' speaking ; and then another time it'll mean summat else, as ye maught say. Aye, it's a fair mawngy thing, Latin is."

" Aye, it maun be mawngy, and all," Will said. " But now what would the Latin be meaning in this particular case, for example ? "

" Well, it's like Ah were telling ye, Will. It means summat, and then again, as Ah explained, it don't—to all intents and purposes. In this particular case, it would tak' an extra lot o' varry, varry deep study to say whet it really does mean."

" How much stoody ? " Will persisted.

" Well," said Sam, feeling he was cornered, " wi ma references and all, happen it'd tak' me nigh on twenty-four hours if it were a case. Here, let me hev' t' paper, and Ah'll let ye knaw tomorrer."

So, of course, it was up to Sam to find out what it meant. Early the next morning, before school, he called on the schoolmaster, who explained to Sam what it meant. That evening Sam waited, triumphantly, in the *Spread Eagle* for someone to ask him about it. But no one brought the subject up. Finally Sam couldn't hold it any longer.

" Oh, by the way, chaps," he said. " About that theer drawi de-saynoor. Ah went into that varry thoroughly today, and i' this case, it's a varry owd law that means of all things that ivvery lass

that gates married i' any o' t' six parishes o' Rudling duchy, hes to sleep wi' t' Duke on t' fust neight of her wedding."

"Sleep wi' t' Duke," Will breathed.

"Aye, sleep wi' t' Duke," Sam affirmed.

"Well, bless ma back and buttons," Old Capper said. "Ah've heeard tell o' such things on t' quiet, like; but Ah nivver knew before they hed a law compelling it."

"Ah nivver heeard tell on it, nawther," old Tweksby mumbled.

"Well, happen that's because we're i' Powkithorpe Brig," Sam said. "That's not one o' t' Rudling parishes. So our lasses can sleep wi' their husbands if they want," he continued.

"They hev to sleep wi' t' Duke," Will Braithewaite breathed. "Well, mates, all Ah can say is, soom people seem to hev all the fun i' life."

And they laughed and banged down their mugs of ale.

But there was one lad who did no laughing. He was Ian Cawper, the biggest and strongest lad in all Yorkshire. The only trouble with Ian was that he was so big that it took a long time for the ideas to get up into his head. By the time they did, generally everyone was busy talking about something else. And it was so in this case. By the time Ian was ready to ask a question, they were all talking about dogs, so all Ian said was:

"Good neight!"

"Good neight, Ian," they said, and Ian lumbered away.

"What's wrang wi' yon, now?" Will Braithewaite said.

"Nowt's wrang wi' him," Sam said. "That's just Ian's way."

But Sam was wrong. There was something wrong with Ian. The thing was that even a huge man's frame can be punctured by an arrow, and Ian was in love. More than that, the girl Ian loved lived in Holdersby. And, most of all, Holdersby was one of the six parishes of Rudling.

That night as Sam went home from the inn he saw Ian looming up in the dark.

"Ah've summat to ax thee, Sam Small," Ian rumbled.

Ian started across the moor, and Sam, knowing how long it took for Ian to get started talking, followed him. They were a couple of miles out and could see the glow of the steel furnaces in Bradfield before Ian stopped.

"Sam Small, is there onybody stronger nor me i' Yorksha that tha knaws?" he asked.

"Nay, Ian lad. Tha's t' strongest lad Ah ivver seed i' all ma travels about t' world."

"And if Ah wanted, Sam Small, Ah could break thee i' two wid' ma bare hands here, couldn't Ah?"

"Aye, that tha could, Ian."

"So Ah could. Well, then, tha weren't codding toneight about t' Duke o' Rudling and—tha knaws."

"Ah, t' drawit de saynoor, tha means? Nay, Ian, it's true as Ah'm standing here flaid o' thee. Ah confeered on it like, wi' t' schoilmeaster to mak' sure there'd be noa mistakes."

Ian stood silent. Sam began to think of the lateness of the hour and how Mully might be sitting up ready to give him Halifax.

"Er—owt else Ah can do for thee, Ian?"

"Nay," Ian said, a minute later, and they started home.

The next evening Ian walked the seven miles to Holdersby to the little dairy farm where Mary Ann Battersby and her mother lived. He didn't know how to approach the matter, but finally he got Mary Ann out for a walk and blurted it out. Then he stood in the deepening evening as she sat on a stile, looking up at her. And Mary Ann was quite worth looking at; pert and pretty as a Guernsey calf, she was.

"Ian, ma love," she said finally. "Ah've got an idea."

"What sort on an idea?"

"This sort," she said. "Us could gate round it all, happen."

"Gate round it?"

"Aye! Now lewk, suppose us aways to Bradfield and pretty as pretty us gates wed, quiet-like. Then his lordship wadn't hear on it until thee and me hed—well—until it was too late."

Ian considered a while. "Mary Ann," he said finally. "Ah'm fair capped at thee, Ah am. Ah'm net sure that'd be honest. Nay, if us did that, happen ivver after us'd feel like us was living under false pretences."

"Nay, if onybody raised a fuss, us could say us didn't knaw."

"But us *does* knaw," Ian pointed out.

And she couldn't budge him from his point, so she made the best of it.

"All reight," she said finally. "After all it may be best, hard on us as it maught seem."

"Eigh now, it relieves me to hear thee tak' it honest like that," Ian told her. "Soa it's all settled, then. All us maun do now is see his lordship and find out what evenings he's not busy like. We'll ax him to pick a neight he's free and us'll be married that day."

"Well," Mary Ann agreed, thinking over the whole proposition, "hard on us as it maught be, the law is the law, as tha says. It does seem funny, though. Ah heven't heard on it afore this."

"Well, Ah don't expect a maid would hear tell on such things," Ian said. "It were only by lucky chance Ah heard on it. Ba gum, if Ah hedn't us maught have made a tarrible mistake."

Ian walked back home, and that Saturday he got all dressed

up in his Sunday best and called for Mary Ann. Together they set off for the Duke's castle. They had no trouble getting in, for the gate was open and lots of ladies in summer clothes were driving in.

Ian went up the gravel paths, through the park, till he came to the big front door of the castle and banged and banged. Finally a great big old chap with fierce eyebrows and a crabbed face opened the door. He was almost as big as Ian himself.

"Is tha t' Duke o' Rudling?" Ian rumbled.

"That Ah am," roared the duke. "Whet can Ah dew for thee?"

"Ah've coom to see thee on a personal matter," Ian shouted. "This is Mary Ann Battersby o' Holdersby and Ah'm Ian Cawper o' Powkithorpe Brig."

"Net the strongest lad i' all Yorksha?" the duke cried.

"Aye, that's me," Ian admitted.

"Well, coom in, lad," the duke roared. "Ah've heard tell on thee. Coom in. Doan't stand o' t' doorstep."

Ian and Mary Ann followed the duke through a hall full of paintings and suits of armour. They went up a noble staircase till they came to a room full of nothing but books and big chairs.

"Sit ye down, the two on ye," the duke said. "Now, Ian lad, whet can I dew for thee?"

At this point the words got stuck in Ian's throat.

"Come, come, come," the duke roared. "Out wi' it!"

Mary Ann came to the rescue.

"Well, him and me's off to be wed."

"Eigh now that's champion," the duke cried. "Just the thing we need. A lot o' little lads i' t' parish wi' some o' thy heft, Ian. And ye'll be heving a hawlf dozen bairns or so, wi'out doubt."

Mary Ann blushed prettily.

"Now in a manner o' speaking, your lordship," she said. "That's almost the varry thing us coom to see ye about."

"See me? Why, damme, eh? What, that is to say—damme!"

"Ian'll explain," she said. "Go on, Ian. Tell t' duke about t' drawit de saynoor."

So Ian explained how he would have called before, but he'd just heard of the arrangement. The duke was very attentive and interested, and so Ian told him how he came to hear about it.

"And since Mary Ann was born and raised i' thy duchy," Ian said, "us decided to coom to thee. Us thowt it would be nobbut the polite thing, like, to ax thee how tha were fixed for appointments. Now how abaht today week."

The duke got up and walked about the room for several minutes.

"Ian," he said. "T' truth is, lad, today week it just happens

Ah maun hev a conference wi' t' House o' Lords."

"Eigh, too bad," Ian said. "Then how about a fortneet from today? Us would like to be wed of a Sat'day."

"Ba gum, Ian. Tha hes me theer, too," the duke said. "It's t' opening o' t' grouse season, and Ah maun off to Scotland."

"Nay, t' grouse season don't open till August," Ian said.

"Now hark at me: That were a slip. Ah meant, it's t' opening o' ma racing season."

"Eigh dear," Ian sighed. "Well, happen it maught be best to wark fro' they end. Now what evenings, like, hes tha free fro' engagements."

The duke scratched his head.

"Ian, lad. Ah'm reight flaid Ah'm booked up solid for sivveral months."

"Sivveral months. Well, then, if we maun wait, we maun. Suppose tha notifies us the first free date convenient."

"Look here, Ian, my lad, it does seem a bit of a shame for thee to be held up."

"But there's no two ways wi' th' law," Ian pointed out. "Us must wait."

The duke pulled his long moustache a while, then he looked at Mary Ann.

"Coom here, ma lass," he said.

Mary Ann went over shyly, and the duke took hold of her hand and patted it. Then he sighed, a long, long sigh, and let go of it.

"Look here, Ian Cawper," he said. "Ah'll tell thee what Ah'm off to dew. For a wedding present Ah'll let thee off my drawit de saynoor. Tha can hev Mary Ann all to thysen the first neight."

"Why, your lordship, tha's that kind," Ian said, "but Ah couldn't hear tell on it."

"Why not?"

"Why, there's the law. The law's the law, tha knaws."

"Aye, but suppose us jost forgates it this time?"

"The law's the law," Ian said. "And hard on us as it maight be, we maun observe it."

They went at it for quite a while with Ian steadfast at the point that the law was the law. So the duke took another tack and proved to Ian that laws were meant to be broken, because if no one broke them there'd be no need for them. The duke put this so cleverly that he floored Ian in the argument, and Ian seemed satisfied. In fact, he had Mary Ann by the hand and was just leaving when he halted his bulk in the doorway. He stood fast while a suspicion seeped from his head down into his body and then permeated him.

"Nay," he said suddenly. "Ah wean't goa. Soa, that's it!"

"Why, Ian," the duke protested, "such a thing as that never passed my mind. She's as bonny and bucksome a lass as I ever saw!"

"Nay, tha needn't try to softsoap us," Ian thundered. "Ah've decided that us'll goa threw wi' this thing in a reight and proper way—and Ah'm net off to hev ma mind changed."

The duke tried to argue, but Ian would have none of it.

"Nay, ma Mary Ann's as good as any other lass i' this duchy," Ian said stubbornly, "and as her future husband Ah'm off to see she gates her reights. Now that's ma final say, soa tha'd better tell ma what neight tha's free, and ba gum if Ah hev to, Ah'll coom wi' her mysen and see it's done reight and proper."

The duke got up and strode round the room, coughing and blowing his nose and looking at Ian and scratching his head.

"Ian, lad," he said finally, "tha's right. It's ma duty. Howivver, there's a few things that Ah maun talk ovver wi' thee—that it's better only men talk about—soa us'll ax Mary Ann to excuse us a minute."

After she was gone the duke sat at his desk and coughed.

"First, Ian Cawper," he said, "Ah want to say tha's been a varry fine and honest lad to stand oop to me and tell me ma duty, the way tha has. There's been few men i' ma life ivver stood oop to me the way tha did—and Ah maun say Ah've nowt but admiration for thee for it."

"Thank your lordship kindly," Ian said.

"In other words, lad, tha's a man after ma own heart. And because tha's a man after ma own heart Ah'm off to let thee into a secret Ah wouldn't let another soul knaw."

The duke looked up to see how Ian was taking this. Then he stood up, peered around cautiously, went to a window and pulled the curtain aside. Ian, looking over his shoulder, saw the lawn below where many women walked or sat at tables sipping tea.

"Tha sees them, Ian?" the duke whispered.

"Aye, Ah dew," Ian said, puzzled. "Who're they?"

"Ian, lad, Ah wean't lie to thee," the duke said cunningly. "They're all waiting for the drawit de saynoor."

"Waiting? Ain't noan of 'em wed?"

"Aye, soom on 'em's wed; but they're waiting."

"Tha means," Ian said, "tha's way behind on—on thy hoamwark."

"That's it exactly—way, way behind on ma homework, Ian."

"Now, by gum," Ian breathed. "There maun be near a hundred on 'em."

"There's ovver a hundred, Ian, ovver a hundred," the duke said sadly.

"Well, now, ba gum, to get caught oop again Ah should say tha hes quite a giant feat afore thee."

"Ian, tha's takken the varry words reight out o' ma mouth. A giant feat it is. Noa other words could describe it. And, moreovver, Ian, tha maun consider Ah'm not the man Ah used to be. Ah—if this were nobbut ma younger days, Ian—ah, then Ah could ha' got cleaned oop o' this bunch in no time, as tha maught say. If Ah were like thee—why, for thee it would be nowt—happen three month or soa."

"Aye, happen Ah could addle it i' three month," Ian agreed, "but eigh, man—that'd be quite a job even for a chap like me."

"That's reight, Ian," the duke said, delighted. "Ah'm that happy tha shows thysen soa properly understanding."

The duke dropped the curtain quickly, and went back to his desk. He sat there in a posture of utter dejection.

"In t' owd days, Ah could keep oop, Ian. But now—at last Ah maun confess—it's gating too much for me."

"Now, now your lordship," Ian said. "Doan't tak' on, now. There, there. Doan't tak' on."

He patted the duke consolingly on his bent shoulders.

"Ian, Ah can't help it. Ah can't. Why, strange as it may seem to an ordinary chap, it's gate to t' point wheer Ah contemplate wi' horror the thowt o' going to bed wi' a lass—even when she's as pert and bonnie a bucksome handful as thy Mary Ann."

And the duke bowed his head in his hands.

"Ba gum," Ian said. "Ah nivver thowt on it that way. Moast men would lewk wi' joy on the prospect of a drawit de saynoor. But Ah onderstand how it could be wearisome. There's limits to all things, no doubt."

"Ian, tha's hit it," the duke said, looking up. "There's limits to all things, as all men knaw, but few women realize. That's why Ah sent thy Mary Ann out—so's us could talk man to man."

"Well, this does put us in a pretty pickle," Ian said. "Ah want dearly to dew what's reight and proper, but Ah mislike sadly to add to thy already heavy burden."

"Tarribly heavy burden, Ian."

Ian walked up and down a moment, as he found it aided him thinking. Then he stopped.

"Your lordship," he said finally. "Ah've coom to a conclusion. Ma conclusion is that while there may be laws o' man, ba gum there's laws o' nature, too . . ."

"There are! There are, Ian!"

". . . And a man may flout the furst, but he cannot the last."

"He cannot, Ian! He cannot!"

"Theerfoar, Ah've decided 'at me and Mary Ann, us is off to let thee off the drawit de saynoor."

"Ian Cawper! Ian Cawper! Ah thank thee from the bottom o' ma heart. And to show thee Ah fully appreciate it, and to mak' oop for allowing me to observe a lapse in ma bounden duty, Ah'll grant thee onything else tha wishes. Now, lad, what dosta wish for?"

That was quite a poser for Ian, so he scratched his head vigorously for several moments.

"Coom, coom lad. Doan't be flaid. Out wi' it. Onything in ma power to grant thee."

"Nay," said Ian. "Coom to think on it, there's nowt Ah could wish for—happen barring one thing."

"What is it? Speak and it shall be thine."

"Well, t' only thing Ah ivver envied thee was running a rabbit or a hare oop i' thy woods."

"What?" roared the duke. "So you're the damned poacher who's been invading my property! I'll . . ."

And then his face changed.

"Ian Cawper, a bargain for a bargain, and nivver let nub'dy ivver say a Yorkshaman ivver retreated from a foe or a promise. So the wish shall be thine. Now away wi' ye, and God mak' thy marriage fruitful."

So away went Ian, and the duke sat there, sadly shaking his head and sighing deeply. He sat there until a servant came in and said:

"Your lordship! The Ladies' Committee for the Society for the Preservation of Ethical Culture are on the lawn. Her ladyship requests that you make an appearance, if only briefly."

The duke sighed again.

"All right," he roared. "Damme, away wi' ye."

And when he finally appeared on the lawn, the ladies agreed that seldom had they seen him in a viler temper. For the Duke of Rudling was deemed to be an incorrigibly bad-tempered old man at all times.

But those same ladies would have been surprised at the duke's temper two weeks later at Ian Cawper's wedding. For he did attend the wedding. And he danced a Roger de Coverley with Mary Ann, and chucked her under the chin, and pinched her where she was plumpest, and sighed and swore and drank three pints of ale.

A right wonderful time they had at the wedding, for the old people recalled that the duke hadn't been down to one of their weddings in twelve years and more. And there he was, shouting

and winking, and everyone tumbling over themselves to get out of his way. For he was remembered as a terrible man when he was crossed, and they were afraid of him.

All but Ian Cawper. Ian Cawper was afraid of no man who ever walked. So he looked the duke in the eye, as one big man should look another. And the duke shook hands with him in front of all the people and said:

"Ian Cawper. Tha were willing to do summat for me, and tha's cheered ma aging days. Soa Ah now dew summat for thee."

Then he gave Ian a leather purse with fifty golden sovereigns in it; and he gave him a roll of paper with red ribbon on it, and inside the paper it said that Ian Cawper should have the right to run hare and rabbit in the Duke of Rudling's woods, and the right should descend to his son, and to that son's son, and on for ever as long as there should be a Cawper to walk, and a woods to walk in.

So it all turned out very well, in spite of the fact that the duke didn't live up to his ancient right and duty.

At first, Mary Ann, being a woman, felt a little upset about it way down in her mind. But as the years went on, even she felt that, perhaps, it had all been for the best.

She would often sigh and look at Ian.

"Ba gum," she would say. "It maught ha' been a reight interesting experience and all, in a manner o' speaking. But on the whole Ah gate noa complaints to mak'—if tha' knaws what Ah mean."

And she hadn't either—if you know what she meant.

* * *

MIDSUMMER WARNING

August is sunburn and moonlight,
August's a menace to men;
When the casual canoer discovers l'amouer,
August has done it again.

August is moonlight and sunburn,
When the bachelor sows as he reaps;
His sunburn will finally unburn,
But he's burned in the moonlight for keeps.

OGDEN NASH

THE SWORD IN THE TREE

It came to me then that I must never tell. For it might be true

by JAMES STREET

A DRIZZLING rain was falling and I had driven about a mile beyond the village before I realized that something was strange about the place and I slowed down, debating whether to turn back and satisfy my curiosity. The debate merely was to appease a sense of logic that taunts me, but seldom influences my behaviour.

My curiosity was responsible for the trip, my first to the South. I was doing a thesis on *American Myths*, a subject so broad that I broke it down to one myth as an example. My intent was to explore the fable and show how it affected its believers with such social phenomena as tradition, honour, chauvinism, etc.

I had chosen a local Carolina myth as my possible example. So I got in my car, christened Rozinante in honour of Don Quixote's horse, and sallied forth, a rather naïve professor imbued with the idea that a rainbow is a natural phenomenon and not the hem of heaven's gown.

Soon after I left Richmond, Virginia, the towns began to look alike; a town square, a Confederate monument, a Post Office Café. It began raining and twilight was nigh, so I hastened through the North Carolina hamlets and, as I reported previously, was beyond the last village when it came to me that something there was different. So I turned around and went back.

There was a sign on the outskirts which announced:

LYSTRA
Please drive carefully. We love our children.

Lystra? Named, obviously, from the town in Asia Minor where St. Paul preached.

The rain changed to a fine mist and as I approached the town square I pulled over to a curb. A girl was sitting on a bench under a spreading live oak. She had no umbrella and was just sitting there, protected somewhat by the tree although the rain was blowing against her in a spray.

She glanced up and smiled as though we were old friends. I am a young man and have black hair and, although I wear glasses, young

women, particularly students who face examinations without preparation, sometimes smile at me. However, no girl ever had smiled at me as this girl did. I considered her smile flirtatious, even amorous, and then I was ashamed of myself for thinking so. She was only being friendly. Therefore, I smiled at her and she tilted her head and laughed. I instinctively thought of the Irish myth of the rain nymph.

Then she called out to me, " Hey ! What do you do up in New York when it rains ? "

" We get in out of the wet," I called back. " Those of us who are sane."

She folded her hands across her knee and leaned against the tree, behaving as though there was nothing left in all the world except her and the rain and the joy of sitting there. She gave me no more attention.

I started my car and rode around the square. There was the Post Office Café, the Astoria advertising a Western, and the Lystra Hotel. A fat man was rocking on the porch of the hotel. It was like all the other little Southern towns I had passed, so I glanced over at the girl under the tree and headed away again.

Then it came to me, and I gasped and turned around quickly.

There was no Confederate monument in Lystra !

The fat man on the hotel porch didn't stop rocking as I parked and stepped hurriedly from Rozinante to shelter. There I removed my hat and rubbed away the moisture, then I opened the screen door and saw that the lobby was empty. " I need a room for the night," I said to the fat man.

" Most folks do." He stopped rocking and looked at Rozinante. " Tell me, son, what do you folks do when it rains ? "

It was the same question the girl had asked. I could see her from the porch, still sitting in the mist and twilight. I decided to answer the question in the Yankee fashion of asking one. " What do you do here when it rains ? "

The man got slowly to his feet. " Oh, we just let it rain."

He opened the screen door and walked to the desk and I followed and signed my name in the register. Laren W. McCall, Malone, N.Y.

The hotel keeper studied my name, then put on his glasses and peered at it and up at me. " Scotch, huh ? "

" Probably," I said impatiently. " Way back. I don't know."

" What's the W. for ? "

" Winton," I said brusquely. " Is it important ? "

He closed the register and handed me a key. " My middle initial is W., for Worth. Last name is Culpepper. We don't get many folks from New York."

I was bursting to ask him why Lystra had no Confederate

monument, that badge of every Southern community. However, I felt the question might be impudent at that time. So I said, " What time is dinner served ? I mean supper."

" Six thirty," said Mr. Culpepper and waddled out from behind his desk. " But I wouldn't eat supper here if I was you."

That was too much for my patience and I asked an explanation. Mr. Culpepper reached into his shirt pocket and took out a partly smoked cigar.

" Well, I tell you, Mr. McCall," he said. " I set the best dinner table in North Carolina. Been doing it for forty-three years. Always the same price. Four bits." He chewed down on his cigar. " But stuff is so dear now that to make out on my four-bit dinner I have to scrimp on supper. So I don't brag about my suppers."

I suddenly liked Mr. Culpepper. " Do you eat supper here ? "

" No. I gen'ly eats up at the Morgan place. Mrs. Morgan sets the best supper table in North Carolina. Four bits. She lays it on for supper, but scrimps on dinner."

I started up the stairs to see my room and he waited until I reached the landing, then called up, " Ever been in a country hotel before ? "

I said I had.

" Well, it ain't no use climbing them steps just to see your room. It is eighteen by fourteen feet with two windows. One stuck. There's an ink well and no ink, and a Bible. Bathroom is down the hall. Tub drips."

Despite my usual reserve, I laughed and I am glad I did. My mirth seemed to prime Mr. Culpepper and he began chuckling in even strokes like a steam piston on a merry engine. His chuckles swelled into laughter and he shook and swayed. Laughter was an art with Mr. Culpepper.

I knew then that I could ask him about Lystra without offending his pride so I followed him to the front porch and sat in a rocker. The rain was passing, but the girl still was under the tree.

" I noticed," I said, " that Lystra is not like other Southern towns. There is no Confederate monument here."

Mr. Culpepper looked over at me, then down at the ash on his cigar. " The whole town is a monument, son."

Just the way he said it, proudly and sadly, caused me to change the subject quickly, and I nodded towards the girl under the tree. " Is that a custom here ? To sit out in the rain ? "

" It's her custom," he said.

" I wonder why she does it." I was watching the girl. She put her arms above her head and stretched. Then she got up and started walking towards the hotel.

Mr. Culpepper's cigar was out, so he threw it away. " She's

Leah Beth Morgan. I've known her all her life and I never asked her why she sits in the mist. Maybe she just likes to sit under a tree and it a-raining."

"She's a very beautiful girl."

Again he looked over at me. "Uh, huh. She has her mother's looks and her daddy's soul. Her daddy is dead." He put his hands behind his head and rocked, watching Leah Beth Morgan cross the square to the sidewalk. "Some folks say her daddy drank himself to death." I was sizing Mr. Culpepper up as a garrulous old gossip and then he said, "But here in Lystra we know he was mommicked."

My ears began tingling. *Mommicked.* I happened to know that the word is archaic English, meaning destroy, and had heard that it still was used in sections of the South. However, I had put that down as another fable.

I was thinking of my thesis and said, "So he was mommicked?"

"That's right. Married Bernice Connor. Prettiest darlin' in the county. Took her away from me. She didn't kill him. She just wrung his spirit dry and he withered." He stopped rocking. "She's a mommick, all right, but she still sets the best supper table in North Carolina."

As Leah Beth Morgan approached, the old man's face lit up and she called to him, "What'll we do if it rains, Mr. Cul?"

"We'll just let it rain, honey. Come on over and meet a friend of mine."

The girl was scarcely damp. A few drops of moisture were on her hair. Again I had the feeling that she was a rain nymph. One good look at her brown hair and bare legs dispelled that myth. Mr. Culpepper presented me without getting up, although, naturally, I stood.

He said, "This is Mr. McCall. Laren W. McCall. The W. is for Winton."

Miss Morgan looked at me for two or three seconds before she spoke and when she acknowledged the introduction her voice was as calm and gentle as the twilight now that the rain had gone away.

"He's from Malone, N.Y.," Mr. Culpepper said. "Aims to eat at your house."

"That is, of course," I said quickly, "if you take paying guests."

She sort of cocked her head to one side and smiled. "This is Lystra, Mr. McCall. We take boarders. We'll be glad to have you."

"He's curious why we ain't got a monument," Mr. Culpepper said and resumed his rocking.

Miss Morgan put one foot on the hotel steps and leaned against the bannister, looking away.

" I just happened to notice that none is here." I wished she would sit there and rock with us. " I am a school teacher and am making a study of the South."

She glanced over her shoulder at me. " You're a school teacher and never heard of Lystra ? "

I didn't know, and still do not know, if she were teasing me. " Am I supposed to have heard of Lystra ? Is it famous for something besides beauty and hospitality ? "

Mr. Culpepper yawned and stretched. " You two walk on up to the house and she can tell you about this town. I'll be along d'reckly."

I was grateful for the suggestion and joined Miss Morgan on the steps. We walked across the square and I commented that nobody would believe that she had been sitting in the rain.

" The tree kept me dry," she said. " Even in a heavy rain only a fine mist seeps through a live oak."

We were beyond the square and walking along a gravel sidewalk. The earth smelled fresh after the shower. " Do you sit there for any reason ? " I asked.

" I like to sit in the rain. Don't you ? "

" I've never tried it, but when it rains I want an umbrella."

There was a trace of mockery in her laughter. " That takes all the fun out of it. Like swimming in your clothes or sleeping with the windows shut. I'll bet you even think the rainbow is just a spectrum instead of the hem of heaven's gown."

" Well, isn't it ? "

" Here in Lystra we call it the hem of heaven's gown. We like it that way."

And suddenly so did I. The stars were coming out, scouting for the moon which hung back timidly, over on the rim of the world. " Now tell me about Lystra," I said.

She took my arm. Yes, I had known her only a few minutes but she took my arm as we walked along. " Lystra," she said softly, " is where none came back. All the young men volunteered and formed Lystra Company and joined the Confederate Army. They rode away one night and none came back."

" None ! "

" Not a one. They all were killed. So, you see, we don't need a monument. Lystra herself is monument enough."

I was musing her words. She made it all sound as though it were yesterday and I glanced up the street, rather expecting to see them galloping down the pike on white horses. They'd be laughing and singing and wearing yellow sashes. They always did in such stories, and such lore is as common as lovers' leaps and haunted houses.

My sanity returned quickly and, thank heaven, I didn't press her for details, although here was what I was seeking; a myth that had influenced the character of an entire community. I forgot about the Carolina myth. Lystra Company and its dead demi-gods was what I wanted.

So far as records go, no company in the Civil War suffered obliteration, although some lost as high as eighty per cent of their effective personnel. Therefore, I was willing to stake my doctorate that Lystra Company was not mommicked. It smacked too much of the mansion and white column myths, the rose gardens, the moonlight and magnolia fables, the white horses and yellow sashes.

"I never heard that story," I said. "Didn't a prisoner come back? Or some wounded men?"

"They all were killed," she said slowly. "They all rode away together one night and vanished. Every young man in town."

We turned a corner and I was glancing down at her face. Then I looked up and gasped. There was a lawn, a spreading green apron for a white mansion. And it had columns. The moon tried the sky and, finding it safe, began soaring. There were magnolias on the lawn. I gulped and felt sheepish and I knew, without doubt, that it was the Morgan place.

"It is a beautiful home," I said. "I am glad Sherman spared this one." I was trying to make a joke.

"He wouldn't have," she said in a tense whisper. "But two old men were left in town and Sherman's Army was afraid to come in."

I dropped that subject then and there. Good Lord! Was Oak Ridge and the atomic bomb really just over the mountains there? We've had three major wars since *that* one. I was in the last one and it seems years ago, but Lystra's war was yesterday, and still was an unwelcome guest in the garden, a shadow on the path. Again I glanced over my shoulder, half expecting to see them riding away on white horses; none to return.

There were several boarders on the wide porch. Leah Beth introduced them to me and then showed me to the living room and her mother.

"Mother," she said. "This is Mr. McCall."

It was hard to believe that Mrs. Morgan, an old lady with white hair and a gentle, sad face, was a mommick. On second thoughts, however, I realized I was in the presence of despotism, the tyranny of sweetness and long suffering, of martyrdom.

"What brings you to Lystra?" Mrs. Morgan asked.

She was the first person to ask me why I was there and on hearing my explanation leaned forward and stared at me. "Who are your people?"

Leah Beth was embarrassed. I had anticipated the question and was glad she asked it because it confirmed one of my opinions about the South, the Shintoism of the fading families.

My mother died when I was a baby and my father, a heating engineer in Buffalo, married again. I was reared by my father's sister because he wanted me to grow up in a small town. My mother came from Watertown, N.Y. And despite all the odes to motherhood, I felt closer to my aunt than to my mother because I never knew my mother. There was nothing unusual about that.

I was telling about myself when Mr. Culpepper came in. He listened for a second, then turned to Mrs. Morgan. " Bernice, for the Lord's sake spare the bones. Besides, I'm hungry."

We went into supper and it was all Mr. Culpepper had promised. I was dawdling over my coffee when Mrs. Morgan, watching me, said to her daughter, " Leah Beth, since Mr. McCall is interested in Southern history why not show him the sword in the tree ? "

Mr. Culpepper excused himself and waddled out of the room. Leah Beth looked down at her plate, then said, " If he wants to see it."

" Of course he wants to see it," Mrs. Morgan said.

Leah Beth motioned for me to follow her into the long hall and we walked to the back porch. She called it the back gallery and we stood there above an old rose garden. I felt like an unbeliever in a shrine and wanted her to know that I felt that way and was about to say so when I noticed the big tree at the far end of the garden and saw the shining steel blade in its trunk.

" That's it," she whispered. " That's the sword in the tree."

" Who put it there ? " I whispered, too.

" One of those who rode away and never came back."

Her hands were resting on the bannister of the gallery and the moon was in her eyes. I touched her hand and she didn't move it. I did it because she was a beautiful girl and because I wanted to feel something alive. " Do you care to tell me about it ? " I asked.

She shrugged and took her hand away and looked up at the moon. " My aunt was living here. She was my great great aunt really. She was twenty-two. My age." Then she smiled wistfully. " They called her a maiden lady. The night they rode away her lover came by to say goodbye. He came up that path yonder."

I looked and there was the path. " Was he riding a white horse? " I asked.

" Yes. A white horse. He was wearing a yellow sash. They met here in the garden. That tree was just a little sapling and he stuck his sword in the tree and told her that as long as his sword remained there the honour of this house would be without blemish. The tree grew up around the sword, but there it is ; still there."

I was entranced. Eventually, however, my senses returned. I said, " May I come back by daylight and see it ? "

She looked at me. " If you want to," she said.

I walked slowly back to the hotel and Mr. Culpepper was rocking on the porch. " Did you see it ? " He didn't look up and I saw that his eyes were closed.

" Yes. And I'm going back tomorrow to look at it. What happened to the aunt ? The maiden lady ? Pine away ? "

" Uh, huh. That's right, son. Her baby lived only a few weeks . . ."

" Oh ! " I said.

" Uh, huh. We had a mighty fine rector here, so the story goes. He wasn't too good to fib a bit for the Lord. He said he'd married 'em, but there was no licence record. Records in them days were pretty skimpy, though. She waited and waited for him to come back, then pined and died of a broken heart."

The same old fable. I went to my room and fell asleep thinking about my thesis.

Bright and early the next morning I went to the barber's shop for a haircut and the men in there were laughing and lying until I walked in. They hushed when they saw me and I felt like a stranger in a far land, an intruder. I got out as soon as possible and sauntered up to the Morgan place. Just as I expected, it wasn't the same by day. There were bare spots on the lawn and the paint on the house was peeling.

I walked around to the rose garden. The bushes needed trimming and the verbena was rank. I went straight to the tree and examined the sword. Then I laughed. No, that's not exactly true. I almost laughed.

It was not a sword at all. It was the blade of an old scythe. Obviously, a worker had hung his implement over a branch of the tree many years before and forgot about it, and the tree had grown around it, and the handle had rotted away.

The story was clear to me then. A lost lover is the usual alibi for an old maid.

I turned to leave and Leah Beth was standing by the gate, an impish smile on her lips and the devil in her eyes. I did laugh then. " It's an old scythe," I said.

" Is it ? " she said. " We thought it was a sword."

" Why, it's plainly a scythe."

Leah Beth still was smiling. " You are a mommick, aren't you ? Knowledge must be a wonderful thing. It must be great to know the difference between a sword and scythe, between bitter truth and beautiful illusion."

I could hardly take my eyes off her for a minute and when I did I

turned back to the tree and peered at the blade. " Amazing," I said. " The first curved Highland broad sword I ever saw. Some might erroneously call it a claymore."

She came to me and stood there by the tree, looking up at me. " You are sweet, Laren. You are a gentleman, a darling."

I bent my neck and kissed her cheek without embarrassment or explanation. It seemed the right thing to do. Besides, I wanted to do it.

My heart was light and gay as I ate Mr. Culpepper's famous four-bit dinner, and then I got drowsy and went with him to the front porch and we took rockers.

I said casually, " That's a broad-sword in that tree up at the Morgan place."

" Uh, huh." He was nodding.

" Any of your people in the Lystra Company that didn't come back ? "

" Uh, huh. A great uncle." His head slipped to his chest.

A cloud rolled in from the east, bringing a breeze and threats of another summer shower. The breeze rustled the hedge around the hotel and Mr. Cul opened one eye and cocked it over at me. " It's gonna rain."

I studied the sky and said, " Uh, huh. Let's just let it rain."

A warmth came into Mr. Cul's face and suddenly I felt an affinity for the old man, as though I had supplied the code words to his affections and had slipped into his heart and found it large enough to accept a stranger who wanted to be liked in Lystra.

It gave me an idea and I crossed the street to the barber's shop and asked for a shoe shine. I was sitting there when the shower came and one of the barbers spoke loudly to me, but with no feeling in his voice. He said, " Hey, Mister, what do you do when it rains ? "

I said, " I just let it rain."

All the barbers stopped their work and stared at me. A customer pulled away a towel and peered at me. Then they all began talking at once, to me and to one another ; small talk about crops and hunting dogs, local gossip and stories. I knew I had furnished the password to that strange Southern camaraderie, that beautiful, blind and sometimes brutal communion of the South, the phenomenon and the paradox.

I was happier than I ever remembered being before. The rain was gentle, and, regardless of my freshly shining shoes, I walked out into it without my hat and looked across the square. Mr. Cul was sleeping on his porch and Leah Beth was under the live oak. I dashed for the tree and sat beside her.

No word was spoken. The shower brushed the tree and sprayed us with a fine, warm mist and I saw things I never had seen before ;

the impudence of time, the futility of pride. My soul was anointed and I realized that in all the welter of things the important thing still is a man and a woman.

I felt for her hand and we sat there until the late sun drove the rain away. The rainbow whipped across the sky and I whispered, " It's the hem of heaven's gown."

" You are a darling," she said.

In my rhapsody, I told her I loved her, trying to hide my haste behind my fervour. I had known her only a day.

She rested her head on my shoulder for a few minutes, then stood and smoothed her dress. " Let's go home to supper. You stay in Lystra a while and if you still think you love me, then I am yours."

Twilight was upon us and I saw Mr. Cul go inside his hotel, banging the screen door. They closed the barber's shop and the men went down to the Post Office Café for coffee. I watched it all. " You can never doubt that I love you, Leah Beth. I'll even come after you on a white horse if you want it that way."

" Wearing a yellow sash ? " The devil was back in her eyes.

" No. I draw the line at that."

We held hands all the way home.

The weeks that followed were an idyll, a séance with serenity, and I asked her to marry me.

She said simply, " I was beginning to worry."

" I'll get a job here," I said. " I'll not ask you to go North with me."

She rubbed her nose against my ear. " I believe it is customary for the woman to go with her man. Ruth set the pattern and it is a good pattern. But what will your folks say if you come back with a provincial girl who sits bare-legged in the rain ? "

" I have no family except my father. And we never see each other. I haven't even written him in a year."

" That's a long time," she said. " And what about your work. Your thesis ? "

That was the rub. We were sitting on the back gallery of her home, over the rose garden and there, shining in the moonlight, was the scythe in the tree, evidence of the very myths I sought. I broached the subject carefully. " I'd like to do my thesis on Lystra," I said.

" That would be fun," she said. " Maybe I could help."

I took the next step. " I'd like to explore the legends of Lystra. No monument. None came back. The sword in the tree and all that. It's exactly what I need."

I felt her looking at me and I dreaded to face her. But when I did she said calmly, " Why not ? "

"I might hurt the people here. They might not like me any more."

Leah Beth laughed. "Why, you conceited darling. Lystra doesn't care what a Yankee Ph.D says." She lifted my hand and rubbed it across her cheek. "You and all the others will never learn that, will you? You'll never learn that Lystra and all her poor little Southern sisters do not prize your ideas as highly as you do."

That got under my skin a bit. "All right," I said. "Then I have my thesis. I'll write the fables, then the facts . . ."

"Have you got the facts?"

"I can get them quickly," I said. "Even if I can't get, for example, the name of the worker who left that scythe in the tree I can furnish a preponderance of evidence to explode the myth."

"Is that a fact?" she said. "Well, now, I do declare."

In that brief minute I was more student than lover and I asked, "What was the name of your great great aunt? The maiden lady."

"Leah Beth," she said quietly.

"No cheating now," I admonished her. "No kidding."

"Her name was Leah Beth."

I wasn't surprised. Mrs. Morgan was the kind of woman who would name her daughter after a martyr, after a lonely, hallowed relative. "Very well," I said. "The man's name?"

She began smiling and I had a premonition. "Now don't try to tell me his name was McCall."

"His name wasn't McCall," she said. "It was Culpepper. Laren Winton Culpepper."

I almost laughed, but I knew she was serious; that she was telling me the truth. "How did he spell Laren?" I demanded. It usually is spelled Loren.

"With an 'a,'" she replied.

I looked at the scythe in the tree and then I did laugh. As a historian, I know that coincidence is a trapdoor, but there are trapdoors in history. "No wonder the people looked at me strangely when I first came here."

"They didn't look strangely at you," she insisted. "That's your imagination. They understand coincidence." She toyed with my fingers, pressing each one, and there was neither shame nor sadness in her tone when she said, "Of course you heard that my maiden aunt had a son. There is no doubt that her baby died, Laren. In case you care."

"Oh, for goodness sakes," I said. "I wasn't thinking about that. I was thinking how coincidence can play the devil with research." That wasn't exactly the truth. I glanced once more at the path he rode up and at the tree, and at the sword in the tree and

remembered the pledge of honour to this house. I kissed her goodnight.

Mr. Cul was sitting in the lobby, and I asked for ink. I wanted to write to my father and tell him about Leah Beth. Mr. Cul got up to get some but I changed my mind. " Don't bother," I said. " I'll 'phone." So I went to my room and put in a call to Buffalo.

Dad was as cheerful as ever. I'm sorry we'd never known each other better. I told him quickly what I was doing in the South so he wouldn't think I needed anything. " I just wanted to tell you I'm going to marry a girl down here," I said.

" What kind of a girl is she ? " he demanded. I scarcely heard him. The connection was bad.

" She sits bare-legged in the rain," I replied.

" Good for her," Dad said. His voice trailed off and I asked him to repeat his words.

He raised his voice. " Connection's bad up here. It's raining and storming."

" Well, let it rain," I said.

He was silent a second, then, " What did you say ? "

" I said just let it rain."

" That's funny," he said. " I haven't heard that expression for a long time. Your mother used to say it."

It was my turn to be silent and I felt a sudden catch in my stomach. " Listen, Dad, some of the people here go in pretty heavy for family stuff." I was blaming a whole community for Mrs. Morgan's curiosity, but I needed a reason for my questions. " I was named after mother's father, wasn't I ? Grandpa Winton ? "

" That's right. Laren Winton. Lawyer in Watertown. Born, bred and died there. And a mighty fine citizen, son, in case those people down there start any family stuff."

" Where did he get his name ? " I gripped the telephone, an old fashioned instrument, until my knuckles were white.

The connection began to clear up and Dad said, " You know, I was thinking the other day that we should see each other more often. You don't remember your mother so you never heard the story from her. And I probably never thought to tell you . . ."

" What story ? " The catch was in my throat.

" Your great grandfather also was Laren Winton. We never knew much about him . . ."

He would have dropped the Culpepper. That's the first thing he'd do.

Dad's voice was very clear. " He became sort of a legend, told over and over until the family believed it."

" Yes," I said. " Go on."

" Your mother used to laugh and tell the tale with all the

trimmings. He said he was from Missouri. Must have been south Missouri, the way he talked, your mother used to say." Dad's chuckle made me lonesome to see him again. " He was a strange man and kept to himself. It was during the Civil War and some said he was a deserter." Dad began laughing. " I used to tease your mother and call him a horse thief. He was poor as Job's turkey when he first came to Watertown, but he had a fine white horse."

I didn't hear much more. His words seemed jumbled. I kept saying to myself that it could be. I promised to bring Leah Beth to see him, and hung up.

I wanted to be with my beloved and tell her that Laren Winton had come back for Leah Beth. I wanted to pull that sword out of the tree and tell her that her family's honour was redeemed. Such sentiment is the privilege of a lover.

Mr. Cul was sitting at the switchboard, staring at the gadgets. " How is your dad ? " he asked, turning his head to look at me.

" How did you know I was talking to my father ? " I demanded.

" Shucks, son. I had to get the call through."

I didn't know and I never want to know if he listened. It came to me then, as clear as a church bell on a frosty night, that I must never tell Leah Beth or anyone else. And if Mr. Cul knew, he would never tell.

For it might be true, and if it were true, then one lived and Lystra no longer could be the place where none came back. The fabric would fall apart. It would be just like any other Southern town. They might even erect a Confederate monument, might cut down the live oak on the square and put one there.

I was in such a hurry to see my darling that I ground old Rozinante's innards. It was just an old coupé, but I could make believe it was a white horse. The door to the realm of let's pretend is closed to no man, not even a professor.

So let the scythe be a sword. When it rains, let it rain. I am no mommick.

* * *

ONE AT A TIME

Mike was learning how to ride, and had chosen a rather unruly beast for his trial run. The animal was a high stepper and bucked and twisted until Mike's patience was nearly exhausted. He kept his temper, however, until his mount finally caught one of his hoofs in a stirrup, whereupon Mike jumped hastily off. " Well, begorra," he shouted indignantly, " if yore goin' to git on, Oi'm goin' to git off ! "

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

For the bedside table — to be taken on retiring

Choose from the clouded tales of wrong
And terror that I bring you :

Of a night so torn with cries,
Honest men sleeping
Start awake with rabid eyes,
Bone-chilled, flesh creeping,

Of spirits in the web-hung room
Up above the stable,
Groans, knockings in the gloom,
The dancing table,

Of demons in the dry well
That cheep and mutter,
Clanging of an unseen bell,
Blood choking the gutter !

ROBERT GRAVES

Under the Bed

You shall read in the legend, how in the night time *Incubus* came to a ladies bedside, and made hot loove unto hir : whereat she being offended, cried out so lowd, that companie came and found him under hir bed in the likenesse of the holie bishop *Sylvanus*, which holie man was much defamed therebie, untill at length this infamie was purged by the confession of a divell made at S. *Jeroms* toombe.

Oh excellent piece of witchcraft or cousening wrought by *Sylvanus !* Item, S. *Christine* would needes take unto hir another maides *Incubus*, and lie in her roome ; and the storie saith, that she was shrewd-lie accolied.

But she was a shrew indeed, that would needes change beds with hir fellow, that was troubled everie night with *Incubus*, and deale with him hir selfe.

But here the inquisitors note maie not be forgotten, to wit : that Maides having yellow haire are most molested with this spirit.

REGINALD SCOT, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584

Comeing up the Staires

In those darke times astrologer, mathematician and conjuror, were accounted the same things ; and the vulgar did verily believe him to be a conjuror. He had a great many mathematicall instruments and glasses in his chamber, which did also confirme the ignorant in their opinion, and his servitor—to impose on freshmen and simple people—would tell them that sometimes he should meet the spirits comeing up his staires like bees.

JOHN AUBREY, 1626-1697, *Brief life of Thomas Allen*

Sweet Dreams

Of Mr. ffrenches Mother's ffather :—He told me that his Grandfather was a loos man. One night he dreamed that he hung over a Lake burning with fire and brimstone by a litle threed, which impressed such a terror upon him to thinke how britle his life was, that from that time a very serious and godly person.

THOMAS WOODCOCK, *17th Century, Papers*

Incantation

A white well
In a black cave ;
A bright shell
In a dark wave.

A white rose
Black brambles hood ;
Smooth bright snows
In a dark wood.

A flung white glove
In a dark fight ;
A white dove
On a wild black night.

A white hand
Waved from dark walls ;
In a burnt black land
Bright waterfalls.

A bright spark
Where black ashes are ;
In the smothering dark
One white star.

ELINOR WYLIE, 1885-1928

Phantome

Scaramouche waves a threatening hand
To Pulcinella, and they stand,
Two shadows, black against the moon.

The old doctor of Bologna pries
For simples with impassive eyes,
And mutters o'er a magic rune.

The while his daughter, scarce half-dressed,
Glides shyly 'neath the trees in quest
Of her bold pirate lover's sail ;

Her pirate from the Spanish main,
Whose passion thrills her in the pain
Of the loud languorous nightingale.

ARTHUR SYMONS

For Pipe-Smokers

A profane pson living nigh Haslingden, who was but poor and took up his time in this trade of smoking and also spent what should releiv his poor family, this man dreamed that hee was taking tobacco and that the Devill stood by him filling one pipe after another for him ; in the morning hee sett to his old cours notwithstanding, thinking it was but a dream, but when hee came to take his pipe, hee had such an apprehension that the Devill did indeed stand by him and doe the office as hee dreamed, that hee was struck speachless for a time, and when hee came to himself hee threw his tobacco in the fire and his pipes at the walls, resolving never to meddle more with it.

REV. THOMAS JOLLY, *Note Book*, 1687

God Bless

From noise of Scare-fires rest ye free,
From Murders—Benedicite.
From all mischances, that may fright
Your pleasing slumbers in the night :
Mercie secure ye all, and keep
The goblin from ye, while ye sleep.

ROBERT HERRICK, 1591-1674

THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN

"You can't budge me," she said. "I want my body back"

by RAY BRADBURY

"NO, there's no lief arguing. I got my mind fixed. You run along with your silly wicker basket. Land, land, where you ever get notions like that? You just skit out of here and don't bother me, I got my tattin' and knittin' to do, and no never minds about tall dark gentlemen with fangled ideas."

The tall dark young man stood quietly, not moving. Aunt Tildy hurried on with her talk.

"You *heard* what I said, young man. If you got a mind to talk to me, well, you can talk, but meantime I hope you don't mind if I pour myself a bit of coffee. There. If you'd been a bit more polite, I mighta offered you some; but you stride in here high and mighty and you never rapped on the door or nothing. I don't like that kind of doing. You think you *own* the place."

Aunt Tildy fussed with her lap. "Land, now, where'd I lay the yarn? I'm making myself a comforter. These winters get on mighty chill, I'll allow, and it ain't fittin' for a lady with bones like rice paper to be settin' in a draughty old house like this without warmin' herself."

The tall dark man sat down.

"That's an antique chair, so be gentle on it," warned Aunt Tildy. "Now, if you wants to start again, tell me things you got to tell, I'll listen respectful. But keep your voice in your shoes and stop staring at me with funny lights in your eyes. Land, it gives me the collie-wobbles."

The bone-porcelain, flowered clock on the mantel finished chiming three. Out in the hall, grouped around the wicker basket, four men waited, quietly, hardly moving, as if they were frozen.

"Now, about that wicker basket," said Aunt Tildy. "It's past six feet long, and by the look of it, it ain't laundry. And those four men you walked in with, you don't need them to carry that basket—why, it's light as thistles. Eh?"

The dark young man was leaning forward on the antique chair. Something in his face suggested that the basket wouldn't be so light after a while. There'd be something in it.

"Shaw, now," Aunt Tildy mused. "Now where've I seen a wicker like that before? Seems it was only a couple year ago. Seems to me—oh! Now I remembers. Certainly I do. It was when Mrs. Dwyer passed away next door."

Aunt Tildy set her coffee cup down, sternly. "So *that's* what you're up on? I thought you were workin' to sell me something. Just set until my little Emily trounces home from college this afternoon! I wrote her a note the other day. Not admittin', of course, that I wasn't feelin' quite ripe and pert, but sort of hintin' I want to see her again, it's been a bunch of weeks. She livin' in New York and all. Almost like my own daughter, Emily is.

"Now, she'll take care of you, young man. She'll shoo you out'n this parlour so quick it'll—"

The dark young man looked at her as if she were tired.

"No, I'm *not*," snapped Aunt Tildy.

He weaved back and forth on the chair, half shutting his eyes, resting himself. Maybe she would like to rest, too? Nice rest.

"Great sons of Goshen on the Gilberry Dike! I got a hunderd comforters, two hunderds of sweaters and six hunderds of pot-holders in these fingers, no matter they're skinny! You run away and come back when I'm done, and maybe I'll talk to you." Aunt Tildy shifted subjects. "Let me tell you about Emily. She's such a sweet, fair child."

Aunt Tildy nodded thoughtfully. Emily. With hair like light yellow corn tassels, just as soft and sweet.

"I well remembers the day her mother died, twenty years ago, leavin' Emily to my house. That's why I'm mad at you and your wickers and such goings-on. Who ever heard of people dyin' for any good cause? Young man, I don't *like* it. Why, I remembers—"

Aunt Tildy paused, a brief pain of memory touched her heart. She remembered twenty-five years back, her father's voice in that old-time fragment:

"Tildy," he'd said, "what are you going to do in life? The way you act, men don't have much with you. Nothing permanent, I mean. You kiss and run. You don't settle down and marry and raise children."

"Papa," Tildy snapped right back at him, "I like laughin' and playin' and singin', but I'm not the marryin' kind. You know why?"

"Why?" asked Papa.

"I can't find a man with my philosophy, Papa."

"What philosophy's that?"

"That death is silly! And it *is*. It took Mama when we needed her most. Now, do you call that intelligent?"

Papa looked at her and his eyes got wet and grey and bleak.

He patted her shoulder. "You're always right, Tildy. But what can we do? Death comes to everybody."

"Fight back!" she cried. "Strike it under the belt! Fight it! Don't believe in it!"

"It can't be done," said Papa, sadly. "Each of us is all alone in the world."

"There's got to be a start somewhere, Papa. I'm startin' my own philosophy here and now," Tildy declared. "Why, it's just silly that people live a couple years and then are dropped like a wet seed in a hole and nothing sprouts but a smell. What good do they do that way? They lay there a million years, helpin' nobody. Most of them fine, nice and neat people, or at least tryin'."

So, after a few years, Papa died. Aunt Tildy remembered how she'd tried to talk him out of it, but he passed on, anyway. Then she ran off. She couldn't stay with him after he was cold. He was a denial of her philosophy. She didn't attend his burial. She didn't do anything, but set up this antique shop on the front of this old house and live alone for years, that is until Emily came. Tildy didn't want to take the girl in. Why? Because Emily believed in dying. But her mother was an old friend, and Tildy had promised help.

"Emily," continued Aunt Tildy, to the man in black, "was the first body to live in this house with me in years. I never got married. I didn't like the idea of livin' with a man twenty—thirty years and then have him up and die on me. It'd shake my philosophy down like a tower of cards. I shied away from the world pretty much. I guess I got pretty pernickety with people if they ever so much as mentioned death."

The young man listened patiently, politely. Then he lifted his hand. He seemed to know everything, with the shine in his cheeks, without her opening her mouth. He knew about her and the last war, in 1917, when she never read a newspaper. He knew about the time when she beat a man on the head with her umbrella and drove him from her shop because he insisted on telling her about Ypres!

Yes, and the dark young man, smiling at her from his seat on the antique chair, he knew about when radio came in, and how Aunt Tildy had stuck to her nice old phonograph records. Harry Lauder singing "Roamin' In The Gloamin'," Clara Butt and lullabies. With no interruptions of news; calamities, murders, mortalities, poisonings, accidents, terrors. Music that was the same each day.

As the years went, Aunt Tildy had tried to teach Emily her philosophy. But Emily's mind was made up about—certain things.

She was nice enough to respect Aunt Tildy's way of thinking, and she never mentioned—morbid things.

All these things, the young man knew.

Aunt Tildy sniffed. "Think you're smart, huh? How you know all those things?" She shrugged. "Well, now, if you think you can come and talk me into that silly wicker basket, you're way off the trestle. You so much as lay a hand on me, I'll spit *right* in your face!"

The young man smiled. Aunt Tildy sniffed again.

"You don't have to simper like a sick dog at me. I'm too old to be made love at. That's all twisted dry, like an old tube of paint, and left behind in the years."

There was a noise. The mantel clock sounded three. Aunt Tildy fastened her eyes on it. Strange. It seemed to her that it had sounded three once before, five minutes ago. She liked the old clock. Bone-pale porcelain, gold angels dangling naked around the numeralled face of it. Nice tone. Like cathedral chimes made small and soft.

"Are you just goin' to sit there, young man?"

He was.

"Then, you won't mind if I take a nap. Just a little cat-nap. Now, don't you get up off that chair. You set right there. You set there and don't come creepin' around me, toddying. Just goin' to close my eyes for a wee spell. That's right. That's right . . ."

Nice and quiet and restful time of day. No noise. Silence. Just the clock ticking away, busy as termites in wood. Just the old room smelling of polished mahogany and oiled leather in the morris chair, and books sitting stiff on the shelves So nice.

You aren't gettin' up from the chair, are you, mister? Better not. I got one eye open for you. Yes, indeed I have. Yes, I have. Oh. Ah. Hmm.

So feathery. So drowsy. So deep. Under water, almost. Oh, so nice.

Who's that movin' around in the dark with my eyes closed?

Who's that kissin' my cheek? You, Emily? No. No. Guess it was my thoughts. Only—dreamin'. Land, yes, that it is. Driftin' off, off, off . . .

AH? WHAT SAY? OH!

"Just a moment while I put on my glasses. There!"

The clock chimed three again. Shame, old clock! Have to have it fixed.

The young man in the dark suit stood near the door. Aunt Tildy nodded her head.

"You leavin' so soon, young man? Good thing! Emily's

comin' home and she'd fix you. Had to give up, didn't you? Couldn't convince me, could you? I'm mule-stubborn. You couldn't get me out of this house, no sirree. Well, young man, you needn't bother comin' back to try again."

The young man bowed with slow dignity.

He had no intention of coming again. Ever.

"Fine," declared Aunt Tildy. "I always told Papa I'd win out. Why, I'm going to knit in this window the next thousand years. They'll have to chew the boards down around me to get me out."

The dark young man twinkled his eyes.

"Quit lookin' like the cat that ate the bird," cried Aunt Tildy. "Get out! And tote that old fool wicker box with you!"

The four men trod heavily out of the front door. Tildy studied the way they handled the wicker. It wasn't heavy, yet they staggered with its weight.

"Here, now!" She rose in tremulous indignation. "Did you steal some of my antiques? My books?" She glanced about concernedly. "No. The clocks? No. What you got in that wicker?"

The dark young man whistled jauntily, turning his back to her and walking along behind the four staggering men. At the door he pointed to the wicker, offered its lid to Aunt Tildy. In pantomime he wondered if she would like to open it and gaze inside.

"Curious? Me? Shaw, no! Get out! Get it outa here!" cried Tildy.

The dark young man tapped a hat on to his head, saluted her crisply goodbye.

"Goodbye!" said Tildy. "Go away!"

The door slammed. That was better. Gone. Darned fool men with their maggoty ideas. No never mind about the wicker. If they stole something, she didn't care, long as they let her alone.

"Look," said Aunt Tildy, pleased. "Here comes Emily, home from college. About time. Lovely girl. See how she walks. But, land, she looks pale and funny today. Walking so slow. I wonder why. Looks worried, she does. Poor girl. Tired, maybe. I'll just hustle her up a coffee pot and a tray of cakes."

Emily tapped up the front steps. Aunt Tildy, rustling around, could hear the slow, deliberate steps. What *ailed* the girl? Didn't sound like she had any more spunk than a flue-lizard. The front door swung wide. Emily stood in the hall, holding to the brass door-knob. Why didn't she come in? Funny girl.

"Emily?" called Aunt Tildy.

Emily shuffled into the parlour, head down.

"Emily! I been waiting for you! There was the darndest

fool men just here with a wicker. Tryin' to sell me something I didn't want. Glad you're home. Makes it right cosy—"

Aunt Tildy realized for a full minute Emily had been staring.

"Emily, what's wrong? Stop starin'. Here, I'll bring you a cup of coffee. *There.*

"Emily, why you backin' away from me?

"Emily, stop screamin', child! Don't scream, Emily! Don't! You keep screamin' that way, you'll go crazy. Emily, get up off the floor, get away from that wall. Emily! Stop cringin', child. I won't hurt you!

"Land, if it ain't one thing it's another.

"Emily, what's *wrong*, child . . .?"

Emily groaned through her hands over her face.

"Child, child," pleaded Tildy. "Here, sip this water. Sip it, Emily. Ah, that's it."

Emily widened her eyes, saw something, then shut them, quivering, pulling into herself. "Aunt Tildy, Aunt Tildy, Aunt Tildy, Aunt—"

"Stop that!" Tildy slapped her. "What *ails* you?"

Emily forced herself to look up again.

She thrust her fingers out. They vanished inside Aunt Tildy.

"What fool notion!" cried Tildy. "Take your hand away! Take it, I say!"

Emily dropped aside, jerked her head, the golden hair shaking into shiny tendrils. "You're not here, Aunt Tildy. You're gone. I'm dreaming."

"You're not dreamin'."

"You're dead!"

"Hush, baby."

"You *can't* be here."

"Lands of Goshen, Emily—"

She took Emily's hand. It passed clean through her. Instantly, Aunt Tildy raged straight up, stomping her foot.

"Why—why," she muttered angrily. "That—fibber! That liar! That sneak-thief!" Her thin hands knotted to wiry, hard, pale fists. "That dark, dark fiend! He stole it, he stole it! He toted it away, he did, oh he did, he did! Why, I—" She found no words. Wrath steamed in her. Her pale blue eyes were fire. She sputtered into an indignant silence. Then she turned to Emily. "Child, get up! I need you. Get up, now!"

Emily lay, shivering.

"Part of me's here!" declared Aunt Tildy. "By the Lord Harry, what's left will have to do. Momentarily. Fetch my bonnet!"

Emily confessed. "I'm—scared."

Tildy planted fists on hips. "Of *me?*"

"Yes."

"Why? I'm no ghostie! You known me most your life! Now's no time to snivel-sopp. You fetch up on your heels or I'll slap you flat across your nose!"

Emily rose in sobs, stood like something cornered, trying to decide which direction to bolt in.

"Where's your car, Emily?"

"Down at the garage—ma'am."

"Good." Aunt Tildy hustled her through the front door. "Now—" Her sharp stare poked up and down the streets. "Which way's the mortuary?"

Emily held to the porch rail, fumbling down. "What're you going to do, Aunt Tildy?"

"Do?" cried Tildy, tottering after her, jowls shaking in a thin, pale fury. "Why, get my body back, of course! Get my body back! Go on!"

The car roared, Emily clenched to the steering-wheel, staring straight ahead at the curved, rain-wet streets. Aunt Tildy shook her parasol.

"Hurry, child, hurry! Hurry before they squirt juices in my body and dice and cube it the way them pernickety morticians have a habit of doin'. They cut and sew it so it ain't no good to no one!"

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, let me go, don't make me drive! It won't do any good, no good at all," sighed the girl.

"Humph!" was all the old woman would say. "Humph!"

"Here we are, Auntie," Emily said, pulling to the kerb. She collapsed over the wheel, but Aunt Tildy had already popped from the car and was trotting with mincing skirt up the mortuary drive, around behind to where the shiny black hearse was unloading a wicker basket.

"You!" she directed her attack at one of the four men with the wicker. "Put down that basket!"

The four men paid little attention.

One said, "Step aside, lady. We're doing our job. Let us do it, please."

"That's my body tucked in there!" She brandished the parasol.

"That I wouldn't know anything about," said a second man. "Please don't block traffic, madam. This thing is heavy."

"Sir!" she cried, wounded. "I'll have you know I weigh only one hundred and ten pounds!"

He looked at her casually. "I'm not interested in your hip

measure, lady. I just wanna go home to supper. My wife'll kill me if I'm late."

The four of them forged ahead, Aunt Tildy in pursuit, down a hall, into a preparations room.

A white-smocked man awaited the wicker's arrival with a rather pleased smile on his long, eager-looking face. Aunt Tildy didn't care for the avidity of that face, or the entire personality of the man. The basket was deposited, the four men retreated.

The man in the white smock, evidently a mortician, glanced at Auntie and said:

"Madam, this is no fit place for a gentlewoman."

"Well," said Auntie, gratified. "Glad you feel that way. Them is my sentiments, neat, but I can't convince those fellows. That's exactly what I tried to tell that dark-clothed young man!"

The mortician puzzled. "What dark-clothed young man is that?"

"The one who came puddlin' around my house, that's who."

"No one of that description works for us."

"No matter. As you just so intelligently stated, this is no place for a gentle lady. I don't want me here. I want me home. I want me cookin' ham for Sunday visitors, it's near Easter. I got Emily to feed, sweaters to knit, clocks to wind—"

"You are quite philosophical, and philanthropical, no doubt of it, madam, but I have work. A body has arrived." This last, he said with apparent relish, and a winnowing of his knives, tubes, jars and instruments.

Tildy bristled. "You lay so much as a cuticle on that body, I'll thrash you!" Again, the parasol.

He waved her aside like a little old moth. "George," he called with a suave gentleness. "Escort this little lady out, please."

Aunt Tildy glared at the approaching George.

"Show me your backside, goin' the other way!"

George took her wrists. "This way, please."

Tildy extricated herself. Easily. Her flesh sort of—slipped. It even amazed Tildy. Such an unexpected talent to develop at this late day.

"See?" she said, pleased with her ability. "You can't budge me. I want my body back!"

The mortician opened the wicker lid casually. Then, in a recurrent series of scrutinies he realized that the body inside was . . . it *seemed* . . . *could* it be? . . . maybe . . . yes . . . no . . . well, uh . . . it just *couldn't* be, but . . . "Ah," he exhaled, abruptly. He turned. His eyes were saucer-wide.

"Madam," he said, cautiously. "Eh—this lady here. She is—a—relative—of yours?"

"A very dear relation. Be careful of her."

"A twin sister, perhaps?" He grasped at a straw of dwindling logic, hopefully.

"No, you fool. Me, do you hear? *Me!*"

The mortician considered the idea. He shook his head. "No," he decided. "No. Things like this don't happen." He went on fumbling with his tools. "Show her away, George. Get help from the others. I can't work with a crank present."

The four men assembled and converged. Aunt Tildy was a lace fortress, arms crossed in defiance. "Won't budge," she said. She repeated this as she was evicted in consecutive moves, like a pawn on a chessboard, from preparations room to slumber room, to hall, to waiting chamber, to funeral parlour, where she made her last fight by sitting down on a chair in the very centre of the vestibule. There were pews going back into grey silence, and a flower smell.

"You can't sit there, ma'am," said one of the men. "That's where the body rests for the service tomorrow."

"I'm sittin' right plumb here until I get what I want."

She sat, pale fingers fussing with her fussy throat lace, jaw set, one high-ankled, button-shoe tapping irritated rhythms. If a man got in whopping distance, she gave him a parasol whop. And when they touched her, now, she sort of—slipped away.

Mr. Carrington, Mortuary President, heard the disturbance in his office and came toddling down the aisle to investigate. "Here, here," he whispered to all of them, finger to mouth. "More respect, more respect. What is this? Oh, madam, may I help you?"

She looked him up and down. "You may."

"How may I be of service, please?"

"Go in that room back there," directed Aunt Tildy.

"Yee-ess."

"And tell that eager young investigator to quit fiddlin' with my body. I'm a maiden lady. My moles, birthmarks, scars and other bric-a-brac, including the turn of my ankle, are my own secret. I don't want him pryin' and probin', cuttin' it or hurtin' it any way."

This was vague to Mr. Carrington, who hadn't correlated bodies yet. He looked at her in blank helplessness.

"He's got me in there on his table, like a pigeon ready to be drawn and stuffed!" she told him.

Mr. Carrington hustled off to check. After fifteen minutes of waiting silence and horrified arguing, comparing notes with the mortician behind closed doors, Carrington returned, three shades whiter.

"Well?" said Auntie.

"Uh—that is. Most irregular. You can't—sit—there."

"Can't I?"

Carrington dropped his glasses, picked them up. "You're making it difficult for us."

"I am!" raged Auntie. "Saint Vitus in the mornin'! Looky here, Mister Blood and Bones or whatever, you tell that—"

"But he's already pumping the blood from the body."

"What!"

"Yes, yes, I assure you, yes. So, you just go away, now, there's nothing to be done. The blood's running and soon the body'll be all filled with nice fresh formaldehyde." He laughed nervously. "Our mortician is also performing a brief autopsy to determine cause of death."

Auntie jumped on to her feet, burning. "Cuttin' me, is he?"

"Y-yes."

"He can't do that; only coroners are allowed to do that!"

"Well, we sometimes allow a little—"

"March straight in and tell that Cut-'em-up to pump all that fine New England blue blood right back into that fine-skinned body, and if he's taken anything out, for him to attach it back in so it'll function proper, and then turn that body, fresh as paint, over into my keepin'! You *hear!*"

"There's nothing I can do. Nothing."

"All right. Tell you *what.* I'm settin' here the next two hunderd year. You hear? And every time anyone comes near I'll spit ectoplasm right squirt up their left nostril!"

Carrington groped that thought around his weakening mind and emitted a groan. "You'll dislocate our business. You wouldn't do that."

Auntie smiled pleasantly. "*Wouldn't* I?"

Carrington ran up the dark aisle. In the distance he made a series of 'phone-calls. Half an hour later cars roared up in front of the mortuary. Three vice-presidents of the mortuary came down the aisle with their hysterical president.

"What seems to be the trouble?"

Auntie told them with a few well-chosen infernalities.

They held a conference, meanwhile notifying the mortician to discontinue his homework, at least until such time as an agreement was reached. The mortician walked from his chamber and stood smiling amiably, smoking a big black cigar.

Auntie stared at the cigar.

"Where'd you put the *ashes?*" she cried, in horror.

The mortician only grinned imperturbably and puffed.

The conference broke up.

"Madam, in all fairness, you wouldn't force us out on the street to continue our services, would you?"

Auntie scanned the vultures. "Oh, I wouldn't mind at all."

Carrington wiped sweat from his jowls. "You can have your body back."

"Ha!" shouted Auntie. Then, with caution: "Intact?"

"Intact."

"No formaldehyde?"

"No formaldehyde."

"Blood in it?"

"Blood, my God, yes, blood, if only you'll take it and go!"

A prim nod. "Fair enough. Fix 'er up. It's a deal!"

Carrington snapped fingers at the mortician. "Don't *stand* there, you mental incompetent. Fix it up!"

"And be careful with that cigar butt," warned Tildy.

"Easy, easy," said Aunt Tildy. "Put the wicker basket down to the floor where I can step in it."

She didn't look at the body much. Her only comment was, "Natural-lookin'." She let herself fall back into the wicker.

A biting sensation of arctic coldness, a great unlikely nausea and a giddy whorling. Like two drops of matter fusing. Water trying to seep into concrete. Slow to do. Hard. Like a butterfly trying to squirm back into its discarded dry husk of flinty chrysalis!

The mortuary people watched Aunt Tildy's wriggles. Mr. Carrington was deeply concerned. He wrung his fingers and tried to assist with boosting and grunting moves of his hands and arms. The mortician, frankly sceptical, watched with idle, amused eyes.

Seeping into cold, long granite. Seeping into a frozen and ancient statue. Squeezing all the way.

"Come alive, damn ye!" shouted Aunt Tildy to herself. "Raise up a bit."

The body half rose, rustling in the dry wicker.

"Find your legs, woman!"

The body grabbled up, blindly groping.

"See!" shouted Aunt Tildy.

Light entered the webbed blind eyes.

"Feel!" urged Aunt Tildy.

The body felt the room warmth, the sudden reality of the preparations table on which to lean, panting.

"Move!"

The body took a creakingly unsteady step.

"Hear!" she snapped.

The noises of the place came into the dull ears. The harsh,

expectant breath of the mortician, shaken; the whimpering Mr. Carrington; her own crackling voice.

"Walk!" cried she.

The body walked.

"Think!" Auntie said.

The old brain thought.

"Now—speak!" she ordered.

The body spoke, bowing to the morticians:

"Much obliged. Thank you."

"Now," she said, finally. "Cry!"

And she began to cry tears of utter happiness.

And now, any afternoon about four, if you want to visit Aunt Tildy, you just walk around to her antique shop and rap on the door. There's a big black funeral wreath on the door. But don't mind that. Aunt Tildy left it there. She has *some* sense of humour. You rap on the door. It's double-barred and triple-locked, and when you rap her voice shrills out at you:

"Is that the man in black?"

And you laugh and say no, no, it's only me, Aunt Tildy.

And she laughs and says, "Come in, quick!" and she whips the door open and slams it shut behind you so no man in black can ever slip in with you. Then she escorts you in and pours you your cup of coffee and shows you her latest knitted sweater.

She's not as fast as she used to be, and can't see as good, but she gets on.

* * *

DEFINITION

DOG, *n.* A kind of additional or subsidiary Deity designed to catch the overflow and surplus of the world's worship. This Divine Being in some of his smaller and silkier incarnations takes, in the affection of Woman, the place to which there is no human male aspirant.

The Dog is a survival—an anachronism. He toils not, neither does he spin, yet Solomon in all his glory never lay upon a door-mat all day long, sun-soaked and fly-fed and fat, while his master worked for the means wherewith to purchase an idle wag of the Solomonic tail, seasoned with a look of tolerant recognition.

AMBROSE BIERCE, *The Devil's Dictionary*

FOOD OF LOVE

It was strictly unrepeatable, the famous Omelette d'Amour

by
WYNFORD VAUGHAN THOMAS

THIS story concerns the two most important things in life—food and love. Food comes before love, as every civilized man will tell you. So, naturally, the story is set in France.

There, in a little village of Burgundy, within sight of the sacred, vine-clad hills of the Côte, lives Jean-Paul duFeu. No need to introduce Jean-Paul. The very name conjures up magic visions of *Truite à l'Aumonde*, *Poularde demi-deine*, *Lièvre royal à la mode duFeu*, all the great gastronomic symphonies of modern times. For Jean-Paul, by common consent, is the prince of cooks, the last descendant of the most illustrious line of chefs and cordons-bleus ever produced by France.

Far back in the eighteenth century, Jean-Paul's great-great-grandfather first captured the Royal favour by a witty soufflé Pompadour, and, since then, a duFeu has always stood at the right hand of the rulers of France, guiding the country's destiny at every moment of her history, moderating tyranny with a sympathetic *Mousse Egalitaire*, calming revolutionary passions with a loyal *Tripe à la mode de Caen*. It was the third Jean-Paul who was ready to make the cake that Marie-Antoinette proposed to throw to the *canaille*; while the fourth illustrious bearer of the name, a culinary Talleyrand, fried his way safely through every governmental kitchen from Napoleon to Louis-Philippe.

As for our own Jean-Paul the Sixth, he was the most glorious of the line, and arbiter of gastronomic taste from the nineteen hundreds to the fatal days of the second German War. It is written of him that his cooking combined the classic restraint of a Vatel with the romanticism of a Brillat-Savarin! His *Omelette duFeu*, his greatest achievement, has been hailed as the beatification of the egg. How could such a man remain in the Nazified Paris of 1940?

With dignity he gathered his pots and pans around him. He made his farewell speech to the faithful. They still treasure the memorable words of the maître, "I am opposed both to the Communism of pressure cooking and to the Fascism of the tin-opener. Remember, a gastronome is a free man!" Then, with

his only daughter Marie, Jean-Paul retired into his native Burgundy.

There, at Mollay-sur-Orne, Jean-Paul came to rest in a high-gabled house set among gardens that sloped down under great trees to a bubbling stream. The maître had money. He had position. He had a weight of years upon him. His bulk paid tribute to the excellence of his own cuisine. He had no need to exert himself. But France in her urgent need called to him, and how else could Jean-Paul best serve her except by cooking ?

So, at the end of a garden where the water reflected a warm sun and the vines stood in carefully ordered rows beside a wall of mellow red brick, he built a new gastronomic temple. Here the good men and true of Burgundy came again on pilgrimage ; the men of the Resistance who could not resist good cooking ! Jean-Paul created new and heartening dishes. Yes, Jean-Paul served his country well ; he served the little township of Mollay-sur-Orne even better !

When peace returned, the news spread. The gastronomes of Paris had missed the maître and went in search of him.

The master received them with open arms and even more readily opened bottles. The newspapers took notice. The Club des Sans Clubs made a discreetly worded note.

Make a detour to the secluded village of Mollay-sur-Orne. There, beside the swift flowing river you may enter a gastronomic heaven, if M. Jean-Paul duFeu is willing to open the door for you. Salute, before you depart, the greatest master of the noble culinary art in all France !

Yet who could bear to depart once he had settled down to one of Jean-Paul's special dinners ? Least of all Monsieur le Curé. One hot August day, when the grapes were almost ready to pop on their stalks, he sat with the maître in the little temple. Monsieur le Curé was a man of God. But he did not believe in completely neglecting the good things of this life. " Heaven," he was accustomed to remark, " is assured. But the good Fathers do not make it clear if the nectar in the celestial cellar has quite the same quality as this excellent Chambertin we are now drinking. We must make the best of this vale of tears. Thank you, my dear Jean-Paul. Another glass."

Today he felt the need of another glass for he was about to broach a delicate subject—the future of the Restaurant duFeu.

" Is not our little town now four-starred because of it ? " said M. le Curé. " Do not discriminating tourists hurry to leave the Route Nationale and risk all to visit us ? Jean-Paul, it is your duty to see that this trust is handed on to posterity. Now, you have a daughter . . . ! "

Jean-Paul admitted it. He had no son. He was too great a

cook not to have made a hash of his married life. His wife had deserted him soon after the arrival of little Marie in favour of a flamboyant business man who didn't know *Crêpes Suzettes* from Yorkshire Pudding. Jean-Paul concealed his sorrow. Like every other great artist, his suffering added splendour to his work. He loved Marie but he did not deny that he would have wished for someone to whom he could have handed on the frying pan.

It was at this point that the Curé played his master-card. "If you cannot have a Prince, why not have a Prince Consort? I have one to propose. Philippe Voiron!"

"*Tiens*," said Jean-Paul, "not the son of vieux Henri? But I remember him a mere child in knickerbockers."

"That was ten years ago," replied the Curé. "Now I have news from Paris. Vieux Henri has re-opened his restaurant. And now his son, young Philippe, is with him. Ah, there is promise of an even greater cook!"

"He is personable?"

"He is as handsome as the next one, Jean-Paul. But does that matter? He can cook. Your Marie will like him."

"But of course, if I say so. She is a good girl. She will not disappoint me. Monsieur le Curé, another glass?"

By the time the bottle was emptied, the affair was settled. Young Philippe was to be invited to visit the temple. If his cooking was half as good as the Curé declared it to be, then here was the appointed heir-apparent. So, in mid-August, Philippe Voiron was summoned to the presence of the greatest cook of France. He came. He cooked. He conquered. Jean-Paul was delighted. But what about Marie?

Truth to tell, Marie was not anything like as delighted as her father. Certainly she was obedient. Equally certainly she appreciated the importance of handing on the duFeu heritage. If Philippe had appeared at any other time but the present, Marie would have gone demurely to the altar, confident that she was combining duty with more pleasure than dutiful girls usually get out of life. Philippe dressed well, with a beautiful pair of padded shoulders and a waist "très Bond Street." His car was impressively low-sprung and its exhaust made a roar like a machine gun. He dazzled Mollay-sur-Orne with Parisian elegance, and when Marie saw him with her father among the saucepans, cool, confident, with the concentration of a true artist, she admitted to herself that six months ago she would have said "Yes" with all the goodwill in the world.

But those six months had made all the difference. In March, Louis Florand had returned to Mollay-sur-Orne.

Now Louis was not exactly handsome. His features were a

little too rugged. His chin was a little too prominent. His hands were a little too large. In short, as every mother in Mollay-sur-Orne was careful to point out, that Florand boy was no film star. But he certainly had a way with him.

Confidence was Louis' key-word. He needed it, for his worldly prospects were anything but bright. He lived with his uncle, the local "*garagiste*," on the outskirts of the town, and since traffic through Mollay-sur-Orne could not be regarded as heavy, the Garage Florand was never a hive of activity. Uncle Florand often declared that he preferred it that way. His life was devoted to pigeons and "*La Pêche.*" Petrol was a mere sideline for this stout-hearted sportsman. You bought it at your peril from the Garage Florand. You might easily depart with a fish hook through your tyres. But you also carried away a fund of good stories about every aspect of life as lived in Mollay-sur-Orne and the heart-warming memory of Uncle himself.

Uncle's smile and sympathy were both needed to the fullest extent on the very evening that young Philippe Voiron returned to Paris after his successful interview with Jean-Paul duFeu. The flashy Voiron sports car went shooting in disdain past the Florand petrol pump. Young Louis Florand came out in time to throw a particularly venomous look of hatred after it. Now that glare had its origin in the momentous Fête of the Liberation. It was from the Fête day that the habitués of the Café des Sports dated the change from Louis the Debonair to the new Louis the Silent and Serious.

Mollay-sur-Orne, be it admitted, had seen no fighting in the 1944 advance. Instead, its happy fate was to be liberated by none other than a gourmet and apostle of enlightened war. His advance swept through Mollay in a sea of Chambertin. The township was duly grateful.

It expressed its gratitude by making the General the only guest at its Liberation Fête. Louis, bronzed and bemedalled, stood in the Guard of Honour. The General noticed him, the crowd noticed him, and young Marie duFeu, on the platform with her father, noticed him. The sky was blue. The music was gay. The flags waved in all directions, and so did the speeches. It was a day to melt cynicism; a day for love and romance. So when Mârie, cool and lovely in her Paris gown, looked down on Louis, covered with ribbons and glory, the whole affair became inevitable.

Opinion was sharply divided on the matter. The young, the enlightened, the romantic, with their headquarters at the Café des Sports, were pro-Louis. The more solid citizens, meeting in the substantial cellars of the Curé's lodgings, were a little doubtful.

The glory of Mollay-sur-Orne was, in their view, threatened by this unfortunate attachment. But the Curé's party had struck the first blow. That inspired visit to Jean-Paul—with the suggestion of Philippe Voiron as a desirable suitor—was the opening shot in a memorable campaign.

Now it was the turn of the Florand party to reply. So when Uncle Florand cleared off a clutter of pigeons from the wine-bin at the back of the garage, and sat down over an open bottle to give Louis his advice, he was conscious of big issues at stake. He indicated the cloud of dust left by the car of the departed Voiron.

"Now the great question is, my nephew, what chance have you got against him?"

"Marie loves me."

"Of course she does," beamed his uncle, "but that is of no importance. In affairs of the heart, you take love for granted just as a general assumes his soldiers are courageous before they go into battle. No. What is called for now is *strategy*."

Here Uncle Florand raised his glass and said, "My boy, I myself will conduct this campaign."

"It's no good, uncle, I can't cook."

"But how do you know you can't cook? Have you tried?"

"Never."

"Then you may be a heaven-sent cook for all you know. And if you can cook, then you have your Marie! Jean-Paul duFeu does not need a man with money. He needs an artist with the saucepan. My boy, why should that artist not be Louis Florand himself?"

"You think it's possible?"

"Louis, there are no Alps where there is a Napoleon! There will be no failures where there is a Florand. Forward! Let our motto from now on be: 'We will burn our bridges, but never our *brioche*!' To our success."

The glasses clashed together. Uncle and nephew clasped each other's hands with fervour. The pigeons fluttered overhead. A customer hooted for petrol unregarded. The Florand army had decided to march. Nothing else mattered!

"Fetch me your Marie at once. She herself is a cook. She shall teach you. I will purchase books. A stove shall be set up, a secret stove. Our secret weapon, eh, Louis! And in a year's time, who knows . . .!"

Louis raced from the garage. A low whistle and Marie slipped out to meet him.

Jean-Paul was in the temple, still mulling over in his mind his interview with young Voiron. An eminently satisfactory interview.

And now to discuss it with Marie, his obedient and well-loved daughter.

But, in love as in war, speed is essential. Jean-Paul had delayed calling for Marie. That delay had allowed Marie to remain well-beloved but no longer obedient. She had seen Louis. She had talked with Uncle Florand. When she answered her father's summons and entered the sun-warmed summer house, she had made up her mind.

She rejected Voiron and, instead, asked her father's blessing on her marriage to Louis Florand.

Jean-Paul took Marie's hands firmly in his. His tone became tender.

" My daughter, listen to me for a moment, I beg of you. What I am going to say may not be pleasant, but, believe me, my duty, my position, forces me to say it. This Florand may be all you say he is. I'm sure you think at the moment that you are in love with him. But he is not a cook. And therefore he cannot succeed to the name, to the inheritance of duFeu. You owe it to me, you owe it to the divine art of gastronomy, to marry a cook. France—nay, the world—demands it. Look around you ; everywhere there is danger. England is in the grip of austerity. Men go to prison if they cook with butter. America ? Why, they tell me they have put even turkey into tins. No perfume of civilized cooking reaches us from behind the Iron Curtain. France alone stands firm. Marie, you are a duFeu. You will do as every duFeu has done before you. You will marry a cook."

Jean-Paul looked hurriedly into Marie's eyes. He had moved himself by his own eloquence. Surely Marie could not resist ?

" Very well, *mon père*. I agree. I will marry a cook ! There is only one thing I ask. Must that cook be Philippe Voiron ? "

" But he is the best."

" If I produced a better . . . ? "

" You cannot, my dear. I have tasted his cooking and I know."

" Will you give me a year to show you that you are wrong ? "

" My dear, I have no thought of rushing you to the altar. Yes, you shall have your year. In twelve months from now, your young man shall come and cook for me. If he is superior to Philippe, then Philippe will go. But not unless he is superior, mark you. Very much superior."

Marie smiled. Jean-Paul asked hurriedly, " And what is the name of this new star in the cooking world ? "

" *Mon père*, it is still Louis Florand."

" *Mon Dieu* . . ." murmured Jean-Paul and hurriedly poured himself out the biggest glass within reach.

So that was how the great battle began—a twelve months' epic tussle that started as a private rivalry in a rural backwater and ended by pushing the International Crisis off the front pages of the Paris newspapers.

All this, however, was far off when Marie rushed to tell her Louis that he had twelve months in which to prove himself a cook; and when M. le Curé immediately countered with a quick telegram to Philippe Voiron informing him that he had a rival, Philippe, to his credit, did not take offence. The prize at stake was too big for that. Philippe was prepared to cook his way through hell for the duFeu heritage, but he must be pardoned for smiling when he heard that his rival was the obscure Louis Florand.

The Florandists had made a romantic gesture. But could even a year's hard work turn Louis into a serious challenger? Uncle Florand alone had no doubts. Under his inspiration, the new stove was set up in the garage. Day and night young Louis slaved at it in the pleasantest labours of Hercules on record. The Florand pigeons were unhesitatingly sacrificed for Louis' culinary education. Fish disappeared in shoals from the neighbouring stream to feed his insatiable fires.

Jean-Paul would have preferred the test to have been made in private. The Curé's party had suggested that, perhaps, the Mayor and one or two of the more reputable citizens should attend. Uncle Florand insisted that the affair should be conducted in the full glare of publicity.

The Paris papers took note. Reporters began to prowl around the Florand garage. The Temple of Jean-Paul itself was not safe from the inquisitive press photographers. Finally a discreet envoy arrived from the Elysée. M. le President intimated that, in a matter of such importance, it might be well if the maître yielded to the popular clamour. The test should take place in public. "After all, a king—and you are a king in your own province," added the subtle envoy—"has no right to disappoint his subjects."

Jean-Paul agreed.

"Return to M. le President and tell him my decision is made. We will appoint the day for the trial as August 15th. And, as for the guests, let everybody in France come, if they can!"

August 15th! Fateful date in the history of gastronomic France! The warm sun rose hurriedly above the long line of the Côte d'Or, like a pancake sizzling on a griddle. The air was rich with the perfume of the ripening vines.

"The day is made for cooking," said M. le Curé as he flung open his window. "May the good Lord grant victory to Philippe."

Outside, the streets were already filling. By car, by charabanc, by special excursion trains, food-lovers were pouring into the town. On the site of the contest—Mollay's flamboyant Town-hall—banners proclaimed welcome.

The citizens of Mollay milled round the fountain in the Square. The sun shone down on men and women dressed in Sunday splendour. The accordions started playing. The swing-doors of the *bistros* clicked like turnstiles at a cup-final.

At eleven o'clock, the high priests of gastronomy themselves appeared. The five judges marched to the Town Hall, with the liberating General at their head. Rotund, rubicund, and ready for everything that would be put before them, they rolled towards M. le Maire. These five stomachs, the pride of French cooking, were surmounted by chests covered with every decoration that would stay on! Heroic trenchermen one and all, their names were household, or rather kitchen words wherever good food is held in proper respect.

The General, naturally, took precedence. Behind him came M. Couteret, millionaire and maker of epigrams, famous for his dictum: "Eat to live? But of course. What else is there to live for?"

M. Ribout and M. Lafourge, authors and gastronomic travellers, walked side by side; while massive in the rear, came M. Bertelot, the great authority on fish. "Fish," he roared to a reporter, "not sea-food. Never mention that trans-Atlantic barbarism in my presence again."

The crowd cheered as they entered the *mairie* to inspect the arrangements. In the small hall, the table had been laid for the five judges and chairs set out for Jean-Paul, Marie and the Mayor. The windows had been left wide open so that the whole of Mollay would have a chance of following the contest.

The real centres of the excitement, however, lay off stage. Two kitchens had been installed at the back of the *mairie.* Loving care had been lavished on their equipment. For three weeks, experts had been testing every saucepan, every oven, every egg-whisk. The judges declared themselves satisfied.

Then the Mayor came forward. With deliberate care, and in a voice that echoed across the Square, he read out the rules of the contest.

Each competitor would be given seven hours in which to prepare a complete meal. The ingredients had been carefully selected and were ready in the kitchens for the attention of the cooks. The two men would be called upon to produce a soup, *Crème d'Ecrevisses d'Urville*; then a fish course, *L'Aiguillette de Saumon de la Loire au vin de Turcheim*, and a main dish, *Poulardes de Bresse Truffées*

à la Périgourdine, with *Salade Mimosa*, followed by *Fonds d'Artichauts à la Brillat-Savarin.*

The final offering was unorthodox, but nevertheless vitally important. It would be an *Omelette duFeu*, the greatest and most exacting test of the art of the cook.

"No help will be permitted to either competitor," the Mayor concluded. "Now to work, and may the best man win!"

Louis and Philippe shook hands with the Mayor. Then, with firm steps, they disappeared into their respective kitchens, leaving Mollay to spend the most breathless afternoon in its history.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The bells of St. Philibert's began to ring out the hour. Six o'clock! The testing time! With each stroke, the crowds raced to the Square.

The Mayor and Jean-Paul rose to their feet.

The General turned to the jury.

"Well, Gentlemen, the time has come."

"May Louis win," fervently murmured Marie under her breath as she followed her father into the dining hall. The thousands outside saw them enter. The jury took their places as Louis and Philippe appeared, hot and anxious, from the kitchens.

"You are ready?" inquired the General.

"We are, sir," Louis and Philippe replied in chorus.

"Then, by all means, let the battle begin."

All France followed that tussle. Round by round, course by course, the honeyed voice of the gastronomic commentator of Radiodiffusion Française brought the sweet smell of cooking into countless homes throughout the country. Excited listeners crouched before loud-speakers as they heard this breath-taking announcement:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the soup of M. Florand has been brought in. The judges are sampling it. The General tastes it. M. Lafourge is doubtful. M. Couteret is confident. As for M. Bertelot . . . ah! listen . . ."

The announcer paused for effects. A noise as of a super-Hoover let loose on a gigantic blancmange swept over France. "Now comes the judgment. Ladies and Gentlemen, the soup is adjudged to M. Florand."

Here, at the very beginning of the contest, was a totally unexpected sensation. Mingled cheers and groans swept the Square. No one had anticipated this result. And it proved to be no flash in the frying pan. Philippe Voiron, it is true, captured the fish with ease, but the main dish . . . (here even the Curé was shaken) . . . the main dish was adjudged, "All square!"

"Heaven be with us!" murmured the Curé. "That means that all depends on the omelette, for the *artichauts* are nothing!"

Now an omelette is no improvised affair. Both men needed time and concentration for this supreme effort. The rivals worked with a fierce intensity. In the breathless quiet, the crack of breaking eggshells echoed along the Côte d'Or. The minutes dragged by. Who would present his offering first?

The judges' handbell tinkled and it was Philippe Voiron who appeared. In his hands he bore a hot plate, from which arose a savour that sent the front rows of the crowd sniffing as it passed. Framed in parsley lay the omelette of omelettes, light and trembling to the touch, a cream-yellow masterpiece that begged to be eaten. When they saw it the Voiron supporters felt they had victory within their grasp.

Philippe laid his omelette with pride and confidence before the judges. The General's eye sparkled and M. Ribout's mouth watered. M. Bertelot said nothing but got down straightaway to the problem of eating the offering. When he reached the edge of his plate, he put down his knife and fork with a satisfied sigh.

"Friends," he said, "I don't know what you think, but young Louis will be hard put to it to equal, let alone surpass, this elegant evocation in eggs of the great days of Jean-Paul's cooking."

The exultant shouts of the Voiron faction echoed around Mollay as these words were eagerly repeated across the Square. When she heard them, Marie felt with all her heart that her Louis was facing his supreme test. This would be—she was absolutely sure of it—his finest hour. She felt that she had to be at his side. Rules or no rules, she must be there to inspire him.

She slipped quietly out of the hall. Unobserved in the prevailing excitement, she pushed open the side door that led to Louis' kitchen.

She arrived at the psychological moment. In his turn, Louis was about to carry in his version of the *Omelette duFeu*. When she saw it, Marie felt all her doubts and hesitations completely swept away. The Voironists had shouted too soon! Wait until the judges saw this creamy-gold perfection! Now she knew that Louis had more than a chance; he, too, had victory within his grasp.

Marie could contain herself no longer. She rushed forward, flung her arms around Louis' neck and imprinted a passionate kiss.

The poets have supplied many examples of fateful kisses. Marie duFeu kissed Louis Florand. This was the most fateful kiss of all.

Louis was caught off balance. The omelette trembled on the plate as Louis' hands lost their grip. There was a sudden crack. Nothing very loud, nothing to arouse attention in the waiting hall, but that crack marked the breaking of Marie's heart and the end

of Louis Florand's dreams. For it was the crack of the plate—and the omelette with it—falling on to the kitchen table.

A second before, Louis had held a perfect *Omelette duFeu* in his hands. Now all that remained was this horrifying yellow lava-flow moving slowly among the piled up plates and the odd ingredients left on the table.

As he looked at it, Louis—the brave and devoted Louis—realized that he had reached the end of his tether. He sat down, covered his face with his hands, and gave a sigh of utter despair.

Outside in the hall the bell tinkled. The judges were ready for the Florand omelette.

Then it was that Marie duFeu gave proof that not for nothing was she Jean-Paul's daughter. Great souls thrive on disaster. So this was a duFeu Dunkirk! "Very well," said Marie to herself, "we must first tidy up the beaches on which we fight."

She walked resolutely to the table and seized another dish. Quickly she flung on to it all that she could collect of Louis' *Omelette duFeu*. She garnished it with parsley and refreshed it with an encouraging pat. Anyone could see that this wasn't Jean-Paul's omelette, and after its sojourn on the table, not even Marie could tell what this curious reshuffled egg-heap now contained. Somehow or other, it still smelt good; it still looked eatable!

Marie pulled Louis to his feet. The bell was tinkling again off stage. It sounded a little impatient.

"Louis, for my sake, for both our sakes, carry this in," Marie whispered.

Louis looked at the dish. "Impossible," he groaned. "They'll know straightaway what has happened."

"But this is still eatable. It's our only chance."

"How can it be? It fell into everything."

The bell rang again. This time Marie didn't hesitate. She forced the dish into Louis' hands and pushed him through the door. Then, white-faced and panting, she leant against the wall out of sight. She had dared all. What would happen?

In dead silence, Louis entered the hall and placed his dish before the jury. There was a gasp of surprise. The Mayor stepped forward anxiously.

"Haven't you made a mistake, my boy? Are you sure you've brought in the right dish?"

"Yes, yes," Louis said, "here is my omelette."

The General took a closer look at it.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but this is not *Omelette duFeu*."

In a second all was uproar. Philippe Voiron leapt to his feet. A wild yell crashed into the hall from his supporters outside. In a body they started to rush the doors and climb in through the windows.

The contest was on the point of turning into a riot, even civil war, when high above the storm sounded the bull-voice of the liberating General.

"Silence, Gentlemen, silence. Let me remind you that the judges have not yet made their decision."

There fell a calm as unbroken as that into which sorely tried mariners sail in the dead centre of a typhoon. The General turned to M. Ribout.

"What do you say, Sir? Does the contest go to Philippe Voiron?"

"Decidedly. He alone has given us an *Omelette duFeu.*"

The General spoke to the next judge.

"M. Lafourge?"

"I agree with M. Ribout. We must reject Louis Florand."

"And M. Couteret?"

"Voiron wins."

"And now, as our decision must be unanimous, I turn to M. Bertelot."

There was no reply.

"M. Bertelot. We are waiting for your decision, please."

Still no reply. Nothing but a series of quiet, satisfied grunts.

"M. Bertelot, I must ask you to look up from the table . . . *Mais, tiens*, you are eating? You have your mouth full!"

"*Oui, mon General,*" gulped M. Bertelot. "I am still eating." (And he smiled a beatific smile.) "I am eating the most delicious, the most enticing, the most ravishing of new creations. I am eating—this!"

M. Bertelot pointed dramatically to Louis Florand's omelette.

"But that's no good, is it?" insisted M. Ribout, gingerly helping himself to an experimental forkful, then another and another, and with each mouthful, he, too, started to smile.

"Look here, we can't have this," said M. Lafourge. But in a moment he was sitting beside M. Ribout and had also started to sample the forbidden fruit.

"It's impossible, isn't it," said M. Couteret, glancing inquiringly at the General. "We shouldn't touch this, should we?"

"Quite impossible. It's not *Omelette duFeu.*"

"You are quite right, Sir," said M. Couteret, as he swallowed a small mouthful, purely as an experiment. "It is not *Omelette duFeu.* But, *mon Dieu* . . . it's even better."

"Better," muttered the General. "What on earth do you mean?"

He hurriedly took an extra large helping. He rolled the first morsel appreciatively over his tongue. He looked at his fellow-judges. Then he tucked in again and kept hard at it until he had cleared the plate.

The tension was unbearable. The Voironists and the Florandists held their breath.

Then the General beckoned to Jean-Paul. The maître took his place at the table. The General put the rest of Louis' omelette before him. Now Jean-Paul began to eat carefully and slowly under the anxious eyes of the judges. He finished his helping, and then wiped his plate spotlessly clean with a piece of bread. He bowed to the General. The General rose to his feet.

"Thank you, *cher maître*. That was all the confirmation I and my fellow judges needed."

"Are you all listening?" continued the General.

The crowd gave a roar of assent.

"Very well. I announce that the judges have now made their decision. It was not the decision they expected to make a few minutes ago, but they are utterly confident it is the right one. Gentlemen, when we laid down our requirements for this contest, we asked each competitor to produce an *Omelette duFeu*. One competitor, Philippe Voiron, did produce the omelette we required, and a very excellent omelette, too. The other competitor, Louis Florand, did something far different. Something bold, unprecedented and dangerous, the sort of thing you might expect from a Napoleon, a Foch, a . . ."

There came a shout from the crowd.

"Thank you," beamed the General. "Yes, if you like it, the sort of *coup-de-théâtre* I enjoy producing myself. Today Louis Florand has fought his Austerlitz! He has surprised his opponent and surprised us all by producing a totally new omelette. A great omelette! We have all tasted it and we are unanimous. We have here a new invention, a superb addition to the gastronomic repertoire. For months he must have been at work in his little kitchen, experimenting and perfecting. Today, with the courage of genius, he chooses this moment to bring it to our notice. The man who can make a perfect *Omelette duFeu* is a great cook, but a man who can improve on it! Ah! there is the worthy heir of the duFeu heritage. We acclaim the new omelette. In honour of its origin we christen it, quite simply, *Omelette d'Amour*. We award the victory to its creator, Louis Florand."

Over the radio, France heard the delirium that followed the words of the liberating General, for delirium it certainly was. Who could give a clear account of affairs in Mollay for the next few hours, when the walls of the *mairie* nearly fell apart with the cheers of the Florandists, and Louis embraced Marie, while Jean-Paul embraced the General, and Uncle Florand embraced everyone in sight; and in the confusion, Philippe Voiron pushed his way out of the hall, climbed into his sports car without bothering to

change out of his chef's uniform and departed at high speed, after blowing the dust of Mollay back into his supporters' faces?

Ah, well! Mollay could do without him! Even the Voironists conceded that point when, as passions cooled in the days that followed, they realized that one of their own lads, a true son of Mollay and a great cook into the bargain, had won the prize.

A few weeks afterwards, the bells of St. Philibert's rang out a consoling and mollified peal. Jean-Paul kept his promise. Louis and Marie were married by M. le Curé, with Uncle Florand sitting in the front seat, and as the bridal pair stepped out into the sunshine, they passed under an arcade of frying pans held by the habitués of the Café des Sports.

So when you drive back to Mollay in the soft warmth of a summer's evening and sit again in the little temple at the bottom of that sweet scented garden, you may still enjoy that more-than-earthly bliss offered by the matured genius of Jean-Paul duFeu, reinforced now by the youth and invention of a worthy heir-apparent. The faint music of a lullaby coming from the sleepy house will assure you that a great tradition is safe and secure.

But one word of advice. Do not ask for *Omelette d'Amour*. It will never be served again.

Like a wise general, Louis Florand does not try to repeat his triumphs. He has been deaf alike to the clamours of the journalists and to the anxious questionings of his judges. Not even to Jean-Paul himself will he reveal the secret of that historic dish.

"My omelette won me a bride, and the duFeu heritage. What more can you ask of any recipe?" he says.

"But Louis," Jean-Paul pleads again and again, "will you not at least give us the ingredients?"

"Sir, with all respect, not even to you," replies Louis.

For how can he explain that, for making *Omelette d'Amour*, you require one smashed plate, one crowded kitchen table, the tinkle of the judges' bell, the devil's own luck, and above all the passionate kisses of Marie, née duFeu?

* * *

AND THE GREATEST OF THESE . . .

There are three kinds of lies in the world: white lies, damn lies, and statistics.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

★*" The Tell-Tale Heart " was first published in* 1843. *Argosy is reprinting it now for two reasons. First because we believe it will interest our readers as a pioneer example of the introspective, stream-of-consciousness technique favoured by so many later short story writers. And again for its intrinsic value : the powerful sense of inevitability, the atmosphere and suspense, the strangely intense insight into the murderer's mind.*

THE TELL-TALE HEART

by EDGAR ALLAN POE

TRUE !—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am ; but why *will* you say that I am mad ? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad ? Hearken ! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain ; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eyes ! yes, it was this ! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold ; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work ! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it —oh, so gently ! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in ! I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so

far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha!—would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern, cautiously—oh, so cautiously, for the hinges creaked. I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye.

And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eyes always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me—for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, for the shutters were close-fastened through fear of robbers, and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing on it steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out, "Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed, listening—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death-watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or relief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the overcharged soul. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart.

I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself, "It is

nothing but the wind in the chimney—It is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*: because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person, for I had directed the ray, as if by instinct, precisely upon that spot.

Have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous; so I am. And now, at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer, I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder and louder! I thought the heart must burst.

And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was

stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even *his* —could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught it all.

When I had made an end of these labours, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart—for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police station and they had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled—for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search—search *well*. I led them at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied ringing in my ears; but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct—it continued and became more distinct. I talked freely to get rid of the feeling; but it continued and gained definitiveness—until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale; but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what

could I do? *It was a low, dull, quick sound—just such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton.* I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I rose and argued about trifles, in a high key, and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men—but the noise steadily increased. O God! what *could* I do? I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a mockery of my horror.

But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! And now, again! hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*—

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

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FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

One Wife—

I could never mix in the common murmur of that rising generation against monogamy, because no restriction on sex seemed so odd and unexpected as sex itself. To be allowed, like Endymion, to make love to the moon and then to complain that Jupiter kept his own moons in a harem seemed to me . . . a vulgar anti-climax. Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman.

To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once. It was incommensurate with the terrible excitement of which one was talking. It showed, not an exaggerated sensibility to sex, but a curious insensibility to it. A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once.

G. K. CHESTERTON, 1874-1936, *Orthodoxy*

Or Five Wives—

I have five wives, whom I love passing well ; and so, please God, may it be to the end of my life.

One I wedded in church, another over a branch of broom, one on the river-bank, one in a woodland glade, and one in a straw-thatched hut.

And when the hour strikes, and it is time for me to go, all five will grieve for me in their five different ways.

They will set up a mighty clamour, and tear their pretty hair ; and from ten weeping eyes will flow a miniature sea.

And one of them will say : " My heart aches ; for I know well that my man will be seeking a new sweetheart in heaven."

JOHN SAMPSON, *Romani Poems*

Life is Still a Muddle—

Mr. Green retired to the *Prudence* and slept with Fred, Arthur slept in the tiny cubbyhole forward, and Jane, in some alarm, sat on the locker in the *Adventure*, and prepared herself for a night with Mrs. Green . . .

"Good night, Mrs. Green," she said, her voice very small.

"Put out the light," croaked Mrs. Green, like one laying a curse, and Jane was so much alarmed that she took four puffs to blow out the lamp.

Mrs. Green then made a great heave with her body, and thrust out her stern, so that the narrow ledge on which Jane lay was reduced by half. Mrs. Green snorted, as if to say, "I'll teach you to run after an honest boatwoman's son," and almost instantly began to snore . . .

Jane thought about Fred. She wondered what it would be like to share a little bed like this with Fred. Mrs. Green drew up her knees so that Jane had to clutch the side of the bed to keep her place. It would be another thing, of course, if it was Fred. She would have the inside berth, next to the wall, for one thing. And Fred would do as he was told, for another. But how about a lifetime, as Mrs. Green had said? How about night after night in a bed like this? Not so bad, perhaps, if it was Fred . . .

She gasped in the stuffy heat, and her limbs felt sticky under her clothes. But Mrs. Green slept well enough. Her snoring ceased suddenly, and, after a deep sigh, began again on another and more contented note, like the second movement of a symphony. Would Fred snore, Jane wondered? Somebody had told her one could cure a man of that. Apart from this bed question, it was a fine life certainly . . .

But in all this there was not much queenery, she thought . . . Probably she would come down to sleeping in her clothes like Mrs. Green. Nevertheless, she had half a mind to marry Fred, if he asked her again. Life was a muddle. And with this inconclusive reflection, lying still on her back (for she was afraid to move), Jane fell asleep.

A. P. HERBERT, *The Water Gipsies*

And Though—

I would you were at home, liever than a gown, though it were of scarlet.

From a letter of a 14th Century wife to her husband

She Vows Him This—

Constant I will be
As the tree, rooted.

Stitch will I,
Burnish, bake and broom,
And peg the billowing Monday line along
With room for song ;

So will my ear
Your day's endeavour praise,
And raise a pillow
For the morrow's care.

Warm will I lie with thee,
So my most pleasure spill
Out of the free, the delicate measure of your will.
This for our seeds' sake
And soul's need.

As mirrors live,
Toil for your toil, heart for your heart
I give.

WILLIAM BOX

—Doubt Creeps In

The trewith is, though he naturally loved the company of woemen, yett he was allwayes naturally averse to marriage, and some times, dreaminge he was maried, haith wept in his sleep very much.

Author Unknown,
The Life of Marmaduke Rawdon of York, 17th Century

But After All—

Here lies my wife,
Susannah Prout ;
She was a shrew
I don't misdoubt :
Yet all I have
I'd give, could she
But for one hour
Come back to me.

Epitaph, from "Ding Dong Bell,"
by WALTER DE LA MARE

THE PRINCESS AND THE TIN BOX

A story with a moral

by JAMES THURBER

ONCE upon a time, in a far country, there lived a king whose daughter was the prettiest princess in the world. Her eyes were like the cornflower, her hair was sweeter than the hyacinth, and her throat made the swan look dusty.

From the time she was a year old, the princess had been showered with presents. Her nursery looked like Cartier's window. Her toys were all made of gold or platinum or diamonds or emeralds. She was not permitted to have wooden blocks or china dolls or rubber dogs or linen books, because such materials were considered cheap for the daughter of a king.

When she was seven, she was allowed to attend the wedding of her brother and throw real pearls at the bride instead of rice. Only the nightingale, with his lyre of gold, was permitted to sing for the princess. The common blackbird, with his boxwood flute, was kept out of the palace grounds. She walked in silver-and-samite slippers to a sapphire-and-topaz bathroom and slept in an ivory bed inlaid with rubies.

On the day the princess was eighteen, the king sent a royal ambassador to the courts of five neighbouring kingdoms to announce that he would give his daughter's hand in marriage to the prince who brought her the gift she liked the most.

The first prince to arrive at the palace rode a swift white stallion and laid at the feet of the princess an enormous apple made of solid gold which he had taken from a dragon who had guarded it for a thousand years. It was placed on a long ebony table set up to hold the gifts of the princess's suitors. The second prince, who came on a grey charger, brought her a nightingale made of a thousand diamonds, and it was placed beside the golden apple. The third prince, riding on a black horse, carried a great jewel box made of platinum and sapphires, and it was placed next to the diamond nightingale. The fourth prince, astride a fiery yellow horse, gave the princess a gigantic heart made of rubies and pierced by an emerald arrow. It was placed next to the platinum-and-sapphire jewel box.

Now the fifth prince was the strongest and handsomest of all the five suitors, but he was the son of a poor king whose realm had been overrun by mice and locusts and wizards and mining engineers so that there was nothing much of value left in it. He came plodding up to the palace of the princess on a plough horse and he brought her a small tin box filled with mica and feldspar and horn-blende which he had picked up on the way.

The other princes roared with disdainful laughter when they saw the tawdry gift the fifth prince had brought to the princess. But she examined it with great interest and squealed with delight, for all her life she had been glutted with precious stones and priceless metals, but she had never seen tin before or mica or feldspar or horn-blende. The tin box was placed next to the ruby heart pierced with an emerald arrow.

"Now," the king said to his daughter, "you must select the gift you like best and marry the prince that brought it."

The princess smiled and walked up to the table and picked up the present she liked the most. It was the platinum-and-sapphire jewel box, the gift of the third prince.

"The way I see it," she said, "is this. It is a very large and expensive box and when I am married, I will meet many admirers who will give me precious gems with which to fill it to the top. Therefore, it is the most valuable of all the gifts my suitors have brought me and I like it the best."

The princess married the third prince that very day in the midst of great merriment and high revelry. More than a hundred thousand pearls were thrown at her and she loved it.

Moral: All those who thought the princess was going to select the tin box filled with worthless stones instead of one of the other gifts will kindly stay after class and write one hundred times on the blackboard: "I would rather have a hunk of aluminium silicate than a diamond necklace."

* * *

GENEALOGICAL

A Marshal of France, who by ability and sheer hard work had risen from the ranks to a dukedom, was once snubbed by a group of hereditary nobles in Vienna.

The Marshal was equal to the occasion. "I am an ancestor," he said. "You are only descendants."

THE SATIN SPANIARDS

Terrible, inscrutable, these folk with the secret, slow smile

by VINCENT CORNIER

WHEN the first of the February winds had blown out with the first February moon, then the whole aspect of Gallerstone's rural life had changed. Cheery men grew furtive. Garrulous men put guards on their tongues. Men whose manners were normally overbearing adopted curiously quiet habits.

And money began to flow. Women appeared in new clothes. They attended all the sales in the countryside and snapped up furniture and carpetings. Wherever they went, it was noticeable that their purses and bags were heavy with big silver.

Always silver—rarely notes. It was all extraordinary to the observer.

Police-Constable Imeson, new to Gallerstone's bleak stone trough of moorland houses, began to wonder *why* this access of currency came to the villagers mainly in silver. He mentioned the matter to his sergeant, Sergeant Mortimer, who visited his house once a day.

" Um ! " Mortimer growled and fingered his chin. " I suppose we'll be losing you next. It's a pity, Imeson, because I rather fancied you had a promising future."

Which uncomfortable crypticism made the constable all the more determined to get to the bottom of this mystery. He asked the reason for Mortimer's remark.

" Well, Imeson, I suppose it's your duty to know." His bluff and good-natured superior appeared troubled. " Equally am I sure that we're going to lose a sound officer, once you *do* know. Now, what's it to be, lad ? "

For the third time P.C. Imeson asked him questions. Then the sergeant told him :

Gallerstone was a cock-fighting stronghold. For generations the villagers had bred and fought cocks. It was admitted by the police of all the Riding that no place in the county was " wicker " at that ugly game. It was also conceded that no other place was one-tenth so well organized against outside legal interference.

" You see, Imeson," the sergeant went on, " it's a case of inter-

marriage mainly. As you ought to know by now, maybe to your cost, everybody here's a relation of every other body. On top of so much, there's their ancient clan spirit. These are hard-drawn moormen. In the past they fought to defend each other's possessions, and it's a habit of heredity now ! "

P.C. Imeson thought of the interiors of some of the beetling houses. Mediæval pikes and swords hung on many a wall, often a crossbow spanned a hearthside—he had even seen a boy cleaving the family firewood with the head of a fifteenth century halberd. He recalled from local history how many times the dark and sinewy Gallerstone men had fought against marauding Scots, out on the moors. Implacable and murderous types, these . . . Age and civilized change mattered little to them. They ignored both.

" Out of a matter of routine duty, Imeson, you'll be compelled to take action against these people, now I've told you all you wanted to know."

The sergeant sighed, got his helmet and signed the day-book. " And within a month or two—I give you a year at the most—you'll find yourself back in civvy street, *smashed*. They'll finish you in the Force, my lad, as they've finished half a dozen good young fellows before you. They're dead evil, and far too clever."

" Still," said the quiet constable, as his sergeant opened the door to go, " you haven't explained away the silver."

" Oh, that's brought in by outsiders who come to gamble on the cocking-mains. Trust Gallerstonites not to accept notes ! Half-crown units are the usual stakes. They seem to reckon on about a hundred quid a night staying here, after a main. Lucrative y'know—another reason for their making damned certain no policeman's going to interfere ! "

Imeson seized on that information as pointing a flaw in the Gallerstone armour. Evidently people from outside were necessary to their trade. From " outsiders " came the gain that made cock-fighting worth while. So, however protective was the Gallerstone community-spirit, perhaps in one of these outsiders was to be found the weapon of its destruction. He would keep his eyes open, and his ears. He would wait for the opportunity that was bound to come.

Meanwhile the February cocks began to burgeon into the savage and full-blooded fighters of early Spring.

The moormen started to sort-and-trim their various fancies. Combs and wattles were treated with white-hot tongs : carefully seared to mere ridges and vestiges of flesh so that the beaks and claws of opponent birds could find no hold on them. Tail plumage was whittled away to leave the veriest stumps of bristles. Cunningly

shaped razors were tooled over bodies, until the fighters were almost denuded of back and wing featherings. Except for their ruffs and thicknesses on their breasts and thighs, the birds were " bared ", or " stripped ".

Now they were put on elaborate diet. They fed on scraped steak and rabbit-heart. They were brought up to an irritant malevolence, a deep-blooded madness, by " brammings " or " cock-bread ", finer than any used on village tables, soaked in port wine which had been dusted with cantharides. Every now and then they had malt and finest screened corn and macerated leaves of yarrow. As day succeeded day they came to fieriest condition.

Easter was nearing. The first big cocking-mains of the year were at hand—mains to make the preliminary February adventurings seem child-play with sparrows. Thousands of pounds would soon be at stake.

P.C. Imeson, also, was becoming a subject of most earnest and secretive attention. He had been marked from the moment of his first movement to suppress this devilish and illegal practice.

He found what he believed to be a weak link. He came across an " outsider ", a man called Nicky Lowis. The fellow was semi-drunken and ugly and vengeful. Readily enough he moaned to Imeson about his cock-fighting losses.

The constable was on night duty at the time. He had to leave the staggering Nicky Lowis at the northern end of the village to go on his hillside beat, a mile or so away. However, Lowis had sense enough left in him to arrange for a further meeting, when he promised to " spill it all."

Early in the morning, Lowis was found about half a mile from the lower end of Gallerstone. He was dead. His face was in a muddy ditch and his cap floated near at hand.

As the coroner afterwards remarked, the unfortunate man, being without money, had evidently attempted a short cut across the moorland to the neighbouring valley town. In his drunken state he had slipped on the brink of the ditch and unconsciousness had supervened . . . The verdict was one of " accidental death : asphyxiation due to drowning."

All the long day of that inquest, P.C. Imeson saw the Gallerstone moorfolk for what they really were. They would stop and look at him with wooden and inscrutable faces. They would pause, unmoving of eye or flesh, then smile and go their ways : smile thinly, slowly, terribly . . . Imeson saw them then as many an unfortunate Scot, wounded out in the heather, must have seen their forefathers smiling in the searches of an evening. Evil—evil were these folk : deadly of purpose. The constable felt sick and he shuddered.

He had no doubts. He *knew* Nicky Lowis had been murdered. Gallerstone would not, dare not, tolerate informers.

In the days that followed, they kept on with their smiling. Grim and enduring was their warning. It got on his nerves. It made him want to scream—to run—to do anything other than meet the slow soft stepping, the puckered-up consideration of those faces, then, the secret smile.

P.C. Imeson, although he knew his real duty, was human enough to be cowed by this mass-impression of menace. He shrank back from Gallerstone; submitted, and let the village go its way.

After the fate of Lowis the process of attrition which had as its aim the ending of Imeson's career became, to a certain extent, ludicrous. It was certainly an anti-climax. Equally as certainly, ludicrous as it might be, it was fatality approaching.

A village shopkeeper, a very old and apparently fragile woman, stopped Sergeant Mortimer one day. She wanted to be told how much the constable earned a week. Mortimer properly snubbed her. And she raged.

She only wanted to know, she said, because "t'swine conna mak' list t'pay his debts to a poor old 'ooman 'at 'as t'werk 'ard enow as it is t'mak' ends meet." According to her tale—verified by her son, who produced a dirty accounts book—P.C. Imeson owed over two pounds for cigarettes and tobacco, "all ticked oop, fer weeks past."

Imeson, when spoken to, vehemently denied owing the woman or anyone else in Gallerstone a single penny.

"My lad," said Mortimer at last, "I take your word. I believe you. But let me tell you they have at least four witnesses who swear they have been in that shop when you've bought stuff on credit. I'm going to believe you, I say—but watch out! The game's started!"

Imeson paid the money. The people smiled.

Next he was astounded to receive a letter from the Lord of the Manor, a retired Bradford wool broker, warning him that if he trespassed on the Hall grounds any more, or trespassed by fishing the Hall's private waters, the "coat would come off his back." Certainly he often went fishing in the evenings. But he had never dreamed of walking over the squire's demesne or fishing his waters. Imeson decided to make inquiries.

Five separate reports, witnessed and signed, were placed before him. Two water bailiffs, a gamekeeper and two local worthies all testified to having seen P.C. Imeson fishing prohibited lengths and trespassing on game preserves.

The squire would not listen to his denials, called him a liar, and

threatened to kick him out . . . All the day thereafter, people smiled.

Then, when he was on point duty one day, he was dumbfounded to observe a girl ogling him from the stony pavement of the one long village street. A big, flashy and handsome wench, Harriet, whose friendship was disastrous to any decent man's character.

While he wondered at her strange behaviour, he half heard two long whistles, coming from far down the village. Harriet stepped into the roadway and deliberately addressed him as though she and he were the oldest and most intimate of friends.

She smiled—but not as *they* smiled. She fooled, flirted, flaunted. She even slapped at his arm and pushed him slightly off his balance, laughing at the top of her voice as she did so. It was a compromising show.

Brakes ground behind him and a furious voice addressed him. He turned, went white, and shakily saluted.

The car whose approach he had neither noticed nor signalled, was a police vehicle. It contained his Superintendent and—worse—the Area Commissioner of Police. He was called off his point to explain his conduct. He tried.

The Super listened, sneeringly. He took out an official schedule and a grubby anonymous letter. He said that this visit was for P.C. Imeson's especial concern . . . Reports had been made, and entered here in the schedule, that certain of the worthy inhabitants of Gallerstone—all names here, no hiding under anonymity—were complaining of their constable's long-continued association with the notorious Harriet. The anonymous letter was in fiercer and more slanderous vein.

Police-Constable John Imeson completely broke down.

Only the timely arrival of Sergeant Mortimer and his fervent protestations of belief in Imeson's complete innocence—his stated opinion that here was another instance of a good officer being ruined, as so many had been ruined before him— averted the constable's immediate suspension prior to disciplinary action being taken.

The Commissioner was a wide-thinking man. He over-rode the Super and said no official action would be taken this time. But P.C. Imeson would have to watch himself carefully in the future. He had been given the benefit of the doubt . . . but, despite denials, that scene on the corner had been very bad.

Imeson walked back to his point, looking for the men who had watched for the police car and had signalled its approach to Harriet, warning her to play her part. He had recognized one of them—Jack Gibbinson, landlord of the *Craven Mitre*. The other he suspected to be Bert Winship, the *Mitre*'s potman. They had vanished.

So had the smiles. Gallerstone's denizens, seeing him back

on duty, altered from secret triumphs of humour to a sullen and ominous attitude. It seemed that they waited, now.

Imeson was scared. He forgot the murder of Lowis. Deliberately he blanked his mind to all things, except his day-to-day routine of duties. He hoped, with his every nerve a fine and tremulous string, that Gallerstone would observe so much and leave him alone . . .

Partly to ease his distress of mind and partly in some vaguely anticipatory effort to have on record some justification in the event of future disaster, John Imeson wrote to his eldest brother. It was a long and detailed letter—a veritable cry from the heart. The brother received the letter in Buenos Aires, where his vessel had put in for partial discharge of cargo and passengers.

" It looks," Captain Imeson said to his Chief Engineer, Sandy McAndrews, " as though things are in a pretty bad way with young Johnny. He's in a spot all right, Mac. Here—just listen to this ! " And he read out excerpts dealing with the Lowis mystery and the Harriet episode. " What the hell can you make of people like that —eh ? Nasty business, nasty dirty business, Mac."

McAndrews half closed his shrewd eyes. He was Captain Imeson's lifelong friend, had met young John and had liked the boy. Moreover, Sandy knew a lot about the illicit game of cock-fighting and had heard much about this notorious Yorkshire strong-hold of the game. Incidentally, Sandy McAndrews was devoid of fear and conscience and loved nothing better than a fight against odds.

" Ye an' me, skipper," he grunted, " wull hae tae gang into conference. If I canna think on some way t' pay off yon scally-rotten crew, I'll eat ma bonnet, toory and a' ! "

The master of the *Fiandora* and his Chief duly went into conference. Except for the most necessary duties of commanding and engineering a ten-thousand tonner, they remained in conference until they berthed at Montevideo.

In that solemn Latin port, McAndrews, preparing for the first extended shore leave he had managed in years, bought two presents to take to Gallerstone, to young John. But he devoutly hoped that John, in his official capacity, would never see them . . . which was strange.

There was something about that spare and vicious little Scotsman that reminded P.C. Imeson of his brother's great friend, Sandy McAndrews, Chief Engineer of the *Fiandora*. Perhaps it was for that reason that John was very patient with the man—drunk and truculent and offensive though he was.

" No, I don't know of any place in Gallerstone where you can

get lodgings for the night," he told the Scot. "You'll have to move on to the nearest town. That's seven miles away, straight across the moor."

"Seven miles? *Seven miles* ye say?" The tramping Scot flung his hat on the ground and squared up to P.C. Imeson. "Ye tell me tae walk seven weary miles, at ten o'clock at nicht, tae find a bed! Tae hell! Come on, laddie, or I'll fecht ye!"

And to the delight of Gallerstonian worthies assembled, the little Scotsman thumped John straight in the midriff. John gasped, sighed, and ran the Scotsman into jail.

Seven days was what "Jock Ferguson", of no fixed abode, received for being drunk and disorderly and assaulting the police. When he came out again he turned up in Gallerstone and took lodgings in the toughest house in the place: that of Bert Winship, the potman of the *Craven Mitre.*

In this somewhat abysmal abode "Jock Ferguson" let it be known how much he had it in for that "dir-r-ty copper, Imeson." The Winships warmed to their lodger. Despite his being a Scot and therefore hereditary foeman, Gallerstone took Winship opinion. Gradually they approved him and admitted him to the fringe of their ugly company.

When, one night in the tap-room of the *Mitre*, "Jock" produced a curiously curved blade in a tortoiseshell holder—to cut tobacco—they admitted him closer. Jointly the secret fraternity gasped and watched that strange keen blade. They looked at one another and a flickering of eyes was made, queerly.

They said it was a funny sort of knife. Foreign maybe?

"*Foreign!*" snorted "Jock" in violent scorn of such ignorance. "Some folk knaw naethin'. Let me be telling ye, ma laddies, this is a cocking-snoop. And if y'dinna ken whit that is, I'll be after tellin' ye in simpler language." He held up the small rind of steel. "That's fer trimmin' fechtin' cocks wi'."

"Fightin' cocks, hey?"

"Aye! Mony an' mony's the brave bird I've trimmed an' set afore this nicht, an' a'."

"*Um*? Tha means t' say thou's fowt game-birds? Dosta know that's agen t' Law, lad?"

"The *Law*?" "Jock" snarled. "When I hit yon Imeson felly i' th' guts—wasna yon agin th' Law, too? Whit th' hell dae I care for law? *Me*, whit's bred some o' th' grandest fechtin' cocks in a' th' worrld!"

"Hasta gotten any now, Jock?"

"Nay. But ma brither up i' Scotland has. Rare killin' strain he breeds, I'm tellin' ye!"

Later, by devious ways and means, it came to pass that "Jock

Ferguson" was sworn into the dangerous brotherhood of the Gallerstone cock-fighters. More—he vowed he would obtain from Scotland two under-seven-pound birds to challenge any the local countryside could produce. His brother, he vaunted, was a grand gambler . . . he'd put up "onny God's amount o' siller," and entrust so much to "Jock" if there was prospect of serious wagering business.

Eventually "Jock" offered to wager—if he took the money laid at a shade of odds—to produce two gamecocks to fight the sixteen Gallerstone cocks in "singles, two-folds, full-mains or shak'-bags." They thought him wild drunk, but gleefully accepted the challenge . . . eight to one against the Scotsman's birds; even if it meant "buying money" at odds of two, three and four-to-one on; there would be some pickings here!

On the night of the contesting of those secret "big money mains" which arose out of "Jock" 's challenges, a queer communication arrived for P.C. Imeson.

Part of it was in his brother's hand-writing and according to the superscription and date, it had been written at the other side of the world two months previously. His brother explained several hitherto mysterious matters relevant to the Winships' new boarder. Imeson recalled, now, that the fellow had reminded him of Sandy McAndrews from the beginning.

He read and re-read the missive until he had its absolute sense in mind. Then he acted. He took his Airedale, his torch, two pairs of handcuffs and a thick stick and walked out of Gallerstone. The spies who watched him go thought he had gone to see Sergeant Mortimer, five miles away.

He had.

An hour or so later cars began to move through the sandy veins of the moorland. Out of them descended curly haired, lisp-tongued and greasy fellows, city "big-time" bookmakers in expensively loud attire.

The "gentry and nobility" also attended—rakes and gamesters from four northern counties. By well guarded routes, through a veritable network of Gallerstone's espionage and protective systems, these "money-men" congregated at last in the tavern called the *Craven Mitre.*

After drinks in long old rooms which the police never entered, they all made for a tall linen cupboard in the kitchens. An odd sort of cupboard, too. When one opened its doors—in the correct way—its shelves and all upon them were also withdrawn. Behind the aperture a down-stepped stairway was revealed, in candle-glow.

Down those well worn steps went the heterogeneous visitors.

The *Mitre*'s cocking-pit, or "bird-hole", was centuries old. Here, surrounded by an octagon of sombre elmwood panelling, in a sunken circle strewn with mingled sand, oak-sawdust and finely broken tan, stood the good " Jock Ferguson " and a big leather bag. He was flourishing wads of banknotes. He " made the book "—taking wagered money and showing " covering money " to give confidence to the most sceptical. He betted to the tune of hundreds.

The city men glistened with excitement. Even laid at odds-on, here was money for old rope! Their quick financial minds had seized on one outstanding fact: this damn' fool Scotsman had plenty of the brass and the gift of the gab, but he stood to be ruined. All that cash he was wagering against them would soon be theirs.

No one had seen the fighting birds he was going to set. But they were only a couple; how on earth could two birds hope to fight all Gallerstone's sixteen, and live?

That was the little Scotsman's gamble. He stood there, raking in the money, taking odds, certainly—yet betting that his nominations would defeat *all* Gallerstone, without reserve . . .

" Come on," someone yelled at last, " let's be havin' you! Money's down. Now put yer birds to set! Ours is ready—where's these knock-outs o' yours? "

" Jock Ferguson " closed and locked his bag on the last of his accepted bets. Then he produced a small crate, shrouded like a parrot's cage. It held two birds. They were each in a compartment, separated by stout aluminium sheeting.

Gallerstone and the gambling " heads " were uneasily quiet all of a sudden. They gasped and goggled wide-eyed.

Never had they seen such magnificent gamecocks. Sometimes, on rare sporting prints, they were pictured, and some of the *cognoscenti* therefore recognized them for what they were. Two Satin Black Spaniards were here, the heaviest and deadliest, the swiftest and most terrible fighting cocks on earth.

Tall, graceful, hammer-built, they were as black as ravens and had the aspect of small eagles. They shone as though they had been glossed with oil. They ruffed and crowed and flickered their heavy legs, easy in their harnessings of fine leather and laces, their steel spurs flashing in the candlelight. Their eyes glowed as garnets in their polls—eager for killing and blood.

" Noo friens', there y'are, all ready for all whit's comin'! Are they no' bonny birrds—eh? But t'hell wi' ye—ye've a' lost! C'mon, wha's takkin' a killin' first? "

In the awful silence the landlord of the *Craven Mitre* pretended to fumble . . . standing to lose more than a hundred pounds, he took an unfair advantage. His fumbling resulted in the release

of the finest pair of cocks in Gallerstone—at the first Black Spaniard.

The satiny devil spread its wings, threw wide its ruff, chuckled horribly and circled like a dancing master. One of the landlord's birds fluttered slightly, making a feint of movement out of which it would strike sideways at an eye. The Spaniard lofted, shot across like a bolt, hooked with a spur—then pecked with its beak.

Two birds with bleeding heads went around in feeble circles—already dead. In fewer than four seconds the landlord had lost his money, the first "set" and the two champions of Gallerstone.

In ones and twos they followed. Three against two in the final of the main. Still the Satin Spaniards struck with bloody beaks and dripping spurs. One had lost an eye. The other had half its plumage torn away and its flesh striped terribly. But, at the last, only one living gamecock, one of the wicked Chesnie Red breed, stood its ground for Gallerstone.

The one-eyed Spaniard contemptuously slew it; literally disintegrated its body, after a round which brought Gallerstone and the visitors—even the ranks of Tuscany—all to their feet, roaring and cheering . . .

Tired and weakened, the victorious Spaniard tried to climb on to its victim's body, to crow. "Jock" darted at it, doffed its head in a stocking foot and popped it with its fellow in the partitioned cage.

"Ye lunatics!" he yelled. "Ye've done yersel's wi' th' yammer y're makkin'! Hark ye! Canna ye hear 'em? The pollis—listen thae whistles—"

The Superintendent, Sergeant Mortimer, P.C. Imeson and twenty others suddenly charged into the cockpit. One by one the captured fraternity was hustled up the stairway into waiting police tenders. A little Scotsman with a big leather bag and an aluminium crate-cage went last.

Winningly he told everyone that he'd go quietly, "like a wee babby" . . . then he pushed Imeson into Mortimer's way, bashed the Super's hat over his eyes and—well—simply vanished.

He might have been caught, had it not been for the suddenly inexplicable stupidities of Mortimer and Imeson who, evidently infected by the Scotsman's practice, also proceeded to get in everyone's way, with remarkable facility.

Back in Buenos Aires, the Chief Engineer of s.s. *Fiandora* cackled as he passed a letter to Captain Imeson.

"Th' gay young dog," he said. "*Losh*, whit d'ye think on yon news—eh? In for his sergeant's stripes th' noo—highly commended ower th' Gallerstone clean-up, an', thank th' Lord, oot o' yon mucky place fer good an' a'! A braw lad, young John."

"Well," growled *Fiandora*'s master, "I will say you played your hand remarkably well, Sandy. *And* you struck a smack for your Bonnie Scotland—those hoodlums'll never forget *that*!"

"By-the-bye, John's after thankin' me for thae backyard roosters I brought oot o' Montevideo . . . I'll gie him their value when he gets wed." McAndrews mused. "Aye, that'll be a' of twa hunner' pounds—a couple o' hunner' oot o' th' six I made yon nicht wi' fechtin' 'em!"

* * *

VICE VERSA

In England everything is the other way round.

On the Continent there is one topic which should be avoided—the weather; in England if you do not repeat the phrase "Lovely day, isn't it?" at least two hundred times a day, you are considered *a bit dull.*

On the Continent Sunday papers appear on Monday; In England—a country of exotic oddities—they appear on Sunday. On the Continent people use a fork as though a fork were a shovel; in England they turn it upside down and push everything—including peas—on top of it.

On the Continent stray cats are judged individually on their merit—some are loved, some are only respected; in England they are universally worshipped as in ancient Egypt. On the Continent people have good food; in England people have good table manners.

On the Continent almost every nation whether little or great has openly declared at one time or another that it is superior to all other nations; the English fight heroic wars to combat these dangerous ideas without ever mentioning which is *really* the most superior race in the world.

Continental people are sensitive and touchy; the English take everything with an exquisite sense of humour—they are only offended if you tell them that they have no sense of humour.

Many continentals think life is a game; the English think cricket is a game.

GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

DABBLING IN THE DEW

With the merry, merry milkmaids and—others

Before green apples blush,
Before green nuts embrown,
Why one day in the country
Is worth a month in town.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, 1830-1894

Country Cousins

It struck her they had been advancing an unconscionable time, and they were no longer on a hard road, but in a mere trackway.

"How could you be so treacherous!" said Tess, between archness and real dismay, and getting rid of his arm by pulling open his fingers one by one, though at the risk of slipping off herself. "Just when I've been putting such trust in you, and obliging you to please you! Please set me down, and let me walk home."

"You cannot walk home, darling. We are miles away from Trantridge, and in this growing fog you might wander for hours among these trees."

"Never mind that," she coaxed, "let me get down, sir, please!"

"Very well, then, I will—on one condition. If you will promise to wait beside the horse while I ascertain exactly our whereabouts."

She accepted these terms, and slid off the near side, though not till he had stolen a cursory kiss. He sprang down, turned the horse's head into the bushes, and made a sort of couch for her in the deep mass of dead leaves. "Are you cold?" he asked.

"Not very—a little."

He touched her with his fingers, which sank into her as into down. "You have only that puffy muslin dress on—how's that?" He pulled off a light overcoat that he had worn, and put it round her tenderly. "That's it, my pretty, rest there; I shall soon be back again."

But by the time Alec D'Urberville turned back the moon had quite gone down. The sleeve of his overcoat unexpectedly caught his foot.

"Tess!" said D'Urberville. There was no answer.

D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.

THOMAS HARDY, 1840-1928, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Frostises in May

As many mistises in March,
So many frostises in May.

Old Country Saying

They shall have musique

To Portholme, seeing the country-maids milking their cows there, they being there now at grass, and to see with what mirth they come all home together in pomp with their milk, and sometimes they have musique to go before them.

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary, Oct. 13th*, 1662

Nut brown maid

I care not for these ladies,
That must be wooed and prayed :
Give me kind Amarillis,
The wanton country maid . . .
Her when we court and kiss,
She cries, " Forsooth, let go ! "
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say " No ! "

For if we love these ladies,
We must give golden showers,
Give them gold, that sell love . . .
Give me the nut-brown lass,
Who, when we court and kiss,
She cries, " Forsooth, let go ! "
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say " No ! "

These ladies must have pillows,
And beds by strangers wrought ;
Give me a bower of willows,
Of moss and leaves unbought,
And fresh Amarillis,
With milk and honey fed ;
Who, when we court and kiss,
She cries, " Forsooth, let go ! "
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say " No ! "

THOMAS CAMPION, d. 1619

Cuntrey Cheare

Good bread and good drinke, a good fier
in the hall,
brawne, pudding, and souse, and good
mustarde withal.
Biefe, mutton, and Porke, and good Pies of the
best,
pig, veale, goose, and capon, and turkey wel drest,
Chese, apples, and nuttes, and good Caroles to heare,
as then, in the cuntrey is counted good cheare.

THOMAS TUSSER, 1524-1580

Ostridge in the straw

I beleeve you must be carefull of your Ostridge this returne of cold weather, least it perish by being bredd in so hot a countrey and perhaps not seen snowe before or very seldome, so that I beleeve it must bee kept under covert and have strawe to sitt upon and water sett by it to take of both day and night; must have it observed how it sleepeth and whether not with the head under the wing, especially in cold wether: whether it bee a wachfull and quick hearing bird like a goose, for it seems to bee like a goose in many circumstances.

It seems to eat anything that a goose will feed on, and like a goose to love the same green hearbes and to delight in Lettuce, endive, sorrell, &c . . . To geese they give oates &c moystnd with beere, butt sometimes they are inebriated with it.

You may trie whether it will eat a worme or a very small eele; whether it will drinck milk, and observe in what manner it drincks water . . . You may lay a bay leafe by the oestridge and observe whether it will take it up . . . When it is Anatomized, I suppose the sceleton will bee made and you may stuffe the skinne with the fethers on . . . If it delights not in salt things you may trie it with an olive.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *in a letter to his son*, 1681

Sour grapes

" Yet, Sir, (said I) there are many people who are content to live in the country."

" Sir," said Dr. Johnson, " they who are content to live in the country, are fit *for the country."*

JAMES BOSWELL, 1740-1795, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

★*Looking back on it all, everyone has a favourite war story—from D-Day to the night a time bomb fell in the back garden. The well-known writer Q. Patrick has one too—with as charming and unusual a heroine as readers could wish for.*

THE FAT CAT

by Q. PATRICK

THE marines found her when they finally captured the old mission house at Fufa. After two days of relentless pounding, they hadn't expected to find anything alive there—least of all a fat cat.

And she was a very fat cat, sandy as a Scotsman, with enormous agate eyes and a fat amiable face. She sat there on the mat—or rather what was left of the mat—in front of what had been the mission porch, licking her paws as placidly as if the shell-blasted jungle were a summer lawn at home.

One of the men, remembering his childhood primer, quoted: "The fat cat sat on the mat."

The other men laughed; not that the remark was really funny, but laughter broke the tension and expressed their relief at having at last reached their objective, after two days of bitter fighting.

The fat cat, still sitting on the mat, smiled at them, as if to show she didn't mind the joke being on her. Then she saw Corporal Randy Jones, and for some reason known only to herself ran towards him as though he was her long-lost master. With a refrigerator purr, she weaved in and out of his muddy legs.

Everyone laughed again as Randy picked her up and pushed his ugly face against the sleek fur. It was funny to see any living thing show a preference for the dour, solitary Randy.

A sergeant flicked his fingers. "Kitty. Come here. We'll make you B Company mascot."

But the cat, perched on Randy's shoulder like a queen on her throne, merely smiled down majestically as much as to say: "You can be my subjects if you like. But this is my man—my royal consort."

And never for a second did she swerve from her devotion. She lived with Randy, slept with him, ate only food provided by him. Almost every man in B Company tried to seduce her with caresses

and morsels of canned ration, but all advances were met with a yawn of contempt.

For Randy this new love was ecstasy. He guarded her with the possessive tenderness of a mother. He combed her fur sleek; he almost starved himself to maintain her fatness. And all the time there was a strange wonder in him. The homeliest and ungainliest of ten in a West country farming family, he had never before aroused affection in man or woman. No one had counted for him until the fat cat.

Randy's felicity, however, was short-lived. In a few days B Company was selected to carry out a flanking movement to surprise and possibly capture the enemy's headquarters, known to be twenty miles away through dense, sniper-infested jungle. The going would be rugged. Each man would carry his own supply of food and water, and sleep in foxholes with no support from the base.

The C.O. was definite about the fat cat; the stricken Randy was informed that the presence of a cat would seriously endanger the safety of the whole company. If it were seen following him, it would be shot on sight. Just before their scheduled departure, Randy carried the fat cat over to the mess of H Company, where she was enthusiastically received by an equally fat cook. Randy could not bring himself to look back at the reproachful stare which he knew would be in the cat's agate eyes.

But all through that first day of perilous jungle travel, the thought of the cat's stare haunted him, and he was prey to all the heartache of parting; in leaving the cat, he had left behind wife, mother, and child.

Darkness, like an immense black parachute, had descended hours ago on the jungle, when Randy was awakened from exhausted sleep. Something soft and warm was brushing his cheek; and his foxhole resounded to a symphony of purring. He stretched out an incredulous hand, but this was no dream. Real and solid, the cat was curled in a contented ball at his shoulder.

His first rush of pleasure was chilled as he remembered his C.O.'s words. The cat, spurning the blandishments of H Company's cuisine, had followed him through miles of treacherous jungle, only to face death the moment daylight revealed her presence. Randy was in an agony of uncertainty. To carry her back to the base would be desertion. To beat and drive her away was beyond the power of his simple nature.

The cat nuzzled his face again and breathed a mournful meow. She was hungry, of course, after her desperate trek. Suddenly Randy saw what he must do. If he could bring himself not to feed her, hunger would surely drive her back to the sanctuary of the cook.

She meowed again. He shushed her and gave her a half-hearted slap. "Ain't got nothing for you, Kitty. Scram. Go home. Scat."

To his mingled pleasure and disappointment, she leaped silently out of the foxhole. When morning came there was no sign of her.

As B Company inched its furtive advance through the dense undergrowth, Randy felt the visit from the cat must have been a dream. But on the third night it came again. It brushed against his cheek and daintily took his ear in its teeth. When it meowed, the sound was still soft and cautious, but held a pitiful quaver of beseechment which cut through Randy like a Jap bayonet.

On its first visit, Randy had not seen the cat, but tonight some impulse made him reach for his flashlight. Holding it carefully downward, he turned it on. What he saw was the ultimate ordeal. The fat cat was fat no longer. Her body sagged; her sleek fur was matted and mud-stained, her paws torn and bloody. But it was the eyes, blinking up at him, that were the worst. There was no hint of reproach in them, only an expression of infinite trust and pleading.

Forgetting everything but those eyes, Randy tugged out one of his few remaining cans of ration. At the sight of it, the cat weakly licked its lips. Randy moved to open the can. Then the realization that he would be signing the cat's death warrant surged over him. And, because the pent-up emotion in him had to have some outlet, it turned into unreasoning anger against this animal whose suffering had become more than he could bear. "Scat," he hissed. But the cat did not move.

He lashed out at her with the heavy flashlight. For a second she lay motionless under the blow. Then with a little moan she fled.

The next night she did not come back and Randy did not sleep.

On the fifth day they reached really dangerous territory. Randy and another marine, Joe, were sent forward to scout for the Jap command headquarters. Suddenly, weaving through the jungle, they came upon it.

A profound silence hung over the glade, with its two hastily erected shacks. Peering through the dense foliage, they saw traces of recent evacuation—waste paper scattered on the grass, a pile of fresh garbage, a Jap army shirt flapping on a tree. Outside one of the shacks, under an awning, stretched a rough table strewn with the remains of a meal. "They must have got wind of us and scrammed," breathed Joe.

Randy edged forward—then froze as something stirred in the long grasses near the door of the first shack. As he watched, the once fat cat hobbled out into the sunlight.

A sense of heightened danger warred with Randy's pride that she had not abandoned him. Stiff with suspense, he watched it disappear into the shack. Soon it padded out.

"No Japs," said Joe. "That cat'd have raised 'em sure as shooting."

He started boldly into the glade: "Hey, Randy, there's a whole chicken on that table. Going to taste good after K ration."

He broke off, for the cat had seen the chicken too, and with pitiful clumsiness had leaped on to the table. With an angry yell Joe stooped for a stone and threw it.

Indignation blazed in Randy. He'd starved and spurned the cat, and yet she'd followed him with blind devotion. The chicken, surely, should be her reward. In his slow, simple mind it seemed the most important thing in the world for his beloved to have her fair share of the booty.

The cat, seeing the stone coming, lumbered off the table just in time, for the stone struck the chicken squarely, knocking it off its plate.

Randy leaped into the clearing. As he did so, a deafening explosion made him drop to the ground. A few seconds later, when he raised himself, there was no table, no shack, nothing but a blazing wreckage of wood.

Dazedly he heard Joe's voice: "Booby trap under that chicken. Gosh, if that cat hadn't jumped for it, I wouldn't have hurled the stone; we'd have grabbed it ourselves—and we'd be in heaven now." His voice dropped to an awed whisper. "That cat. It must be blown to hell . . . But it saved our lives." Randy couldn't speak. There was a constriction in his throat. He lay there, feeling more desolate than he'd ever felt in his life before.

Then from behind came a contented purr.

He spun round. Freakishly, the explosion had hurled a crude rush mat out of the shack. It had come to rest on the grass behind him.

And, seated serenely on the mat, the cat was smiling at him.

* * *

We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it—and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on the hot stove-lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove-lid again—and that is well; but also she will never sit on a cold one any more.

MARK TWAIN

UNDER MOONLIGHT

Without boats we cannot cross the river, and without love we cannot live through this life

by SHEN TSENG-WEN

ON the eighth night of the moon, the moon was half full and hung in the sky at an early hour. Down at the foot of the long range of mountains which drove up from the south and lay along the border of the province, there were stockades where there had settled the remnants of a people long neglected by mankind and forgotten by history. They had been living in this corner of the world for many years, speaking a language of their own, following their own customs and dreaming their own dreams.

In the soft evening air, fanned by a gentle breeze, there hung the heavy smells of paddy stooks, ripe mountain fruits, beetles and the vapours of the earth. Everything was maturing and bringing to its appointed fullness all that had been brought forth by the sunlight, the rains and the dews of summer.

The soft clear moonlight cut the clean outline of the castle whose shadow lay across the slope like the shadow of a giant. And by the opening in the castle wall facing the moon stood No Yu, the only son of the chieftain of the village. Gazing at the moon, the boy smiled as he pondered the bitterness and happiness of life.

"*. . . Human life is worth living, for everything in it is enjoyable. But still more enjoyable it would be if the sun and moon could be bidden to stop at any place we pleased.*"

For this was the story he had been told:

The first tribesman, discontented with worldly good fortune and all that he had obtained by force and intelligence, armed with greedy desire and the gifts of great power, desired to chase after the sun to search for the moon. His desire was to subdue the god who controlled them, to force them to slow down their courses among those who were granted the world's blessings and to accelerate it among those who had lost their hearts for love and had been emaciated by distress and despair. At last he caught up with the sun, but scorched by its heat, he died of thirst in the great pool of the west.

The sun and moon knew full well that this was a human desire, one among the desires of the ten thousand creatures; and they

paid no attention to it. The gods were just. They had no prejudices. Man was not the sole master of the world, and the sun and moon did not exist for man only. The sun gave heat and power to all living creatures; the moon, to whom all the insects desired to sing, made use of their songs and her silvery light to draw all things into peace. Since then, the sun and the moon had continued to pour their light over the world, observing the joys and despairs of human life, beholding the fair as they turned ugly and observing the ugly who were called fair.

But human beings were driving forward too quickly. Man was superior to all creatures in intelligence, and more immoral than anything under the sun. And since neither the sun nor the moon could punish men with severe cold or terrible heat, they took counsel of the god in whose charge had been placed the fate of human hearts and devised a way by which men could be punished through their feelings, since they lived on their feelings: the happy should feel their days too short and the sorrowful should feel their days too long.

At this moment the chieftain's twenty-one-year-old son, endowed with superb physique, smiled knowingly at the moon in full contentment; and it seemed to him that the moon was smiling back at him. Beside him lay a heap of white. This was a young girl, who had laid her pretty head of dishevelled hair against his thighs, and she was sleeping quietly and peacefully, as if lying on a pillow. Her small pointed face resembled bleached marble in the moonlight, or the moonlight itself. Her dark hair was like fine yarn spun out of the wintry night by fairies hiding in caves. Her eyes, her nose, her ears, her little mouth which was the source of happiness, and those round, small and mysterious dimples which the country folk describe as "nests of kisses"—all these were of divine workmanship. Her smile, her glance, a movement of her head and everything else of hers possessed a divinity. She, who had been created by gods and demons, should be accorded the treatment which is reserved only for gods and demons, lest she be wronged.

She lay quietly beside him, clothed entirely in white clothes which covered her tall, round, supple and fragrant body. And in the memory of the young man her body appeared to have been carved from mingled white jade, milk cream, delicious fruits and sweet flowers. They had come here in the daytime. She had sung in the sun, and towards evening she had fallen asleep, but soon she would wake up for the new moon.

A stream of cool light poured down on them, gently stroking the whole body of the sleeping girl. Along the slopes a composite symphony of clear sounds was being performed by various insects.

The moon seemed to be standing in the air ; it was a long time since it had moved.

Happiness made the young man sigh.

He lowered his head, kissed the hair spun out of the black night and drew nearer to the demon's work.

From afar there came the sound of singing and a reed pipe. Nearby fireflies were hovering around the castle with their little torches, so that they seemed to be guiding fairies among the castle walls.

No Yu, who was known as the most celebrated singer among the youths of the place, began to sing ; and lest he might disturb the girl or the fireflies, he sang in a low voice :

A dragon should be hidden in the clouds,
And you should be hidden in my heart.

The girl was dreaming deeply, but in her dream she turned her head slowly and replied :

My soul is like a flag,
And your sweet songs are like a soft breeze.

He thought she had awakened, but listening on, he found that she had turned her head to the moon and was still dreaming. And so he continued singing :

People say that I have a poison in my song,
But every song is but a sheng of wine, only enough
for a day's intoxication ;
Of your honeyed words,
A single one will sweeten my heart for a whole year.

With her eyes still closed in her dream, the girl replied :

Neither of the wintry wind nor of the sea gales
Can this flag stand the blows.
O blow lightly, blow gently.
(Blow, spring wind, sweet gentle spring wind)
Blow open the flowers, and do not sweep them low.

By this time it occurred to the young chieftain that his songs might be a cradle in which to rest her soul, and he continued singing :

With their wings birds fly into the sky,
Without wings I fly into your heart.
I shall not ask where Paradise is,
For I am sitting at its gate.

And the girl answered :

My body needs the strongest arms,
And my soul needs the sweetest songs.

Now No Yu began to think, groping for words in his brain like a jeweller trying to pick jewels from his bag. No Yu's bag was full of glittering pearls and rare stones, and just because their number was too large, he was somewhat at a loss to choose among them and was slightly embarrassed. He felt that while the gods had created beauty and love themselves, it devolved upon human beings to create the compliments needed for the divine workmanship; and it was beyond the powers of common men to find suitable words to express this beauty in all its glory, or to describe the powers of love without losing the original emotion.

"This girl deserves the love of Lung Chu to adorn her body, and Lung Chu's poems and songs to decorate her beauty." Thinking in this way, he felt a little ashamed. He faltered and dared not continue singing.

His songs had become the cradle for the girl to sleep in, and this was why she had again fallen into her dreams after half waking up. But when the singing ceased, she awoke.

Seeing her awake, he closed his eyes and pretended to be still sleeping. The girl had slept from sunset until this time, and had perfectly restored her spirits. Seeing that he was still leaning asleep against the wall, and fearing that the stone wall might be too cold, she took her white cape and spread it over him. Then she lay against him, recalling now the red clouds which filled the sky when she fell asleep and seeing the crescent moon overhead; and she began singing gently, as a mother sings a lullaby to her baby:

In sleep the shining light served to cover me.
Waking, I use the moon as my lantern.

The chieftain's only son burst out laughing. Four shining eyes were fixed upon each other, and at the corners of their mouths each was smiling. In this smile they had recorded all that they had done in the daytime. Both seemed to feel shy at their memories of the past, and they leaned close to one another and exchanged a new smile. And each seeing the paleness of moonlight on the other's face, they looked up at the crescent moon hanging in the sky.

Then, from a distant farm where a sorcerer was performing sacrifice to the earth and the gods, there came the sound of horns, gongs and drumbeats. Following these jubilant sounds to their origin, they turned their eyes into the distance, over the hills and towards the river.

Without boats we cannot cross the river, and without love we cannot live through this life.

I can never be drowned in this small river, but I will drown myself in your little mouth.

Their true minds were still written in smiles, and in those

mysterious symbols, and yet each saw clearly what was in the other's smile. The white shimmering waters and the thin vapours of the long river in the distance, a river which resembled in its winding course a running belt, had somehow increased the warmth of their hearts.

The girl spoke of the songs she had heard in her dream and of which she had sung; and she thought that they were both dreaming even then. When the young chieftain explained what had happened, they laughed for a long while.

The girl was as naïve as a spring breeze and as happy as a kitten. The long sleep had restored her from the fatigue of the day. Now, in the moonlight, she resembled a fish in the rapid streams. Meanwhile they talked nonsense and gave rein to their boundless fancies, employing all the foolish words which lovers employ in their dreams, and in the fervour of young love.

The young chieftain said:

"Don't talk! Let me mind a single word to praise the beauty of your eyebrows and your hair!"

"What if I talk! Will it interfere with your flattery? Oh, a talented person shows his talent even in his flattery!"

"The gods do not talk. When you are silent, you are like . . ."

"I prefer to be human. Let us be human, and let us be happy."

"I am of the opinion that you resemble the sisters of the Lady Fairy Ho. I would prefer you to be a little bit duller than those two elder sisters of yours, so that there might be words to depict your nobility."

"You once told me you wished your hound to be nimbler."

"That's true, for then it would be easier for me to find you in the mountains, and besides, it would be safer if I wished it to carry a letter for me."

"When you wish me duller, you are wishing that the antelope should be duller, too—I would not be able to escape when you urge your hound to bite me!"

"Good music is often repeated. Will you be so kind as to repeat your words."

"Very well. I remember that you wished the antelope was duller."

"That was because when the antelope becomes duller and less nimble on her feet, my hound can chase her down and catch her as a present to you. It is when you are duller that I shall have words enough to praise you!"

"You have splendid words in your mouth, but now tell me about your feelings. If lies are more beautiful than truth, I shall still listen to your lies."

"You have invaded my heart as the night has invaded the earth."

"But when the moon rises, the darkness only invades a small portion of the earth?"

"The moon cannot reach the heart."

"If so, then I must have given you my darkness."

"What you have given me is light, a dazzling light, which pricks and oppresses me like sunbeams. Oh, you stupefy me. You make me so humble."

"Yet your heart remains clear. In choosing your flattering words you only prove the clarity of your heart."

"Clear water does not breed fish and a pure heart holds no flowery words."

"The flow of a river is endless, and the words of the heart can never be exhausted. Stop talking! A mouth is not made for talking only!"

At this moment their lips found another use, and they remained silent for a short while. Their two hearts beat together, and they gazed at the long range of mountains, at the river and the villages and the fields under the moonlight, as though in a dream. The notes of the reed-pipe seemed to have become moistened in the moonlight, and more solemn. In the watch-tower at the corner of the village the drum was being beaten a second time. The girl suddenly remembered something. She held the youth's clever head in her two hands, printed many kisses on his eyes, his eyebrows, his nose and his mouth, then shook her head at him and sighed helplessly. Then she raised her hands and fell on her knees before him and smoothed down her dishevelled hair. At that moment she intended to rise and leave him.

The young chieftain understood this and embraced her, preventing her from rising.

"Even the fireflies know how to play with their torches. Why are you hurrying away? Where are you going?"

"A shooting star knows where to come and where to go. And I, too, have my own place."

"Treasures should be kept in the treasury, and you should be kept in the home of the man who loves you."

"Beautiful things need no home: the shooting stars, the flowers fading, fireflies and the blue-headed, red-billed, green-winged mango-birds, who sing best of all birds—none of these have a home. Who has ever seen a caged phœnix? Who can bind the moonlight?"

"Even lions need their consorts. Even the gods would approve if I kept you in my home."

"What is approved of the gods is often disapproved by man."

"My father will allow me to do this, because he loves me."

"But my father loves me, too, and should he know about it he

would treat me accordingly. If I were bound with ropes and sunk deep in the earth's eye, whose bottom cannot be reached even by forty-eight hempen ropes linked together, still when I am dead I should have no means to come to you, and even if I should live in dreams, still I would not be able to find you."

What the girl said was true, for according to the custom of the tribe a girl was allowed only to love her first lover and to marry the second. If she violated the tradition she would be tied to a mill-stone and flung into a deep pool or thrown into a pit. The custom had come down from ancient times. There was a time in the past when this tribe, like other tribes, imagined virgins as evil. The chieftains were the more enlightened among them, and the sorcerers lived repressed lives, and so they undertook to enjoy the wedding night of the girls, and thus gradually they learned to enjoy the virgins.

The first man, therefore, could deprive a girl of her chastity, but he could not have her love for ever. If he should marry the girl, he would suffer an evil fate. The superstition had gradually lost its original meaning, but tradition preserved the ancient ordinances of the tribe, and they were obeyed by all the tribesmen. For this reason young lovers did not expect to dream long over their first loves. "*Sweet flowers do not blossom for long, the shining moon is not round for ever and the stars do not always shine.*" So they would sing of their first love with sadness and melancholy.

When the day of parting came, they often experienced the feeling of: "*The orchids will not open their buds again, nor will happiness return,*" and so they fled away together. But there were others who threw themselves silently, hand in hand, into the yawning crater of a volcano which had been extinct for thousands of years. And there were still others who risked marriage and later lost the girls they loved and saw them being thrown into the pit.

It was impossible to abolish this custom, and as soon as they came of age, girls were allowed complete liberty. Strangers found it quite easy to enjoy these girls, and the more sensible girls chose a man at haphazard and then sought marriage with the men they loved. Any sensible man, madly in love with a girl and knowing her still a virgin, thought nothing of allowing her to sleep with a stranger. Yet these fiendish customs were not approved by the gods, and there were youthful people who were apt to act in accordance with the will of the gods and against traditional customs. There were still girls who delighted in offering themselves wholly to the boys they loved; and there were still boys who desired to possess the girls' chastity and love them for ever. Though a cruel law was

attached to the custom, there were occasions when young people sacrificed themselves to the law.

When the girl first encountered the chieftain's only son, it was spring and the wild yellow plum-flowers were blossoming. She was conquered by his tender songs and his exceedingly powerful limbs; and they had loved one another with a perfectly pure love. Because they loved feverishly and with suppressed passion, they did not seem to have thought of marriage; and it occurred to neither of them to follow the time-honoured tradition of suffering chastity to be deflowered by another in order that they should marry afterwards.

But when autumn came, everything was ripening, the fruits on the trees were falling to the ground, grain was being stored in the barns, the autumn hens were hatching their eggs, and Nature, to decorate the earth which had been quivering and hustling for a whole year, painted the sky glorious with colours and made clear the streams and torrents, and the air was warm and sweet, and the earth carpeted with yellow flowers, and cloudlike colours touched the trees and grasses. Everything was put in order, and soon it became man's turn to undergo the proper transformations.

Autumn ripened everything, and now ripened the love of the two lovers.

As usual, they had met in the afternoon by the old castle. Together they had plucked innumerable wild flowers and scattered them on the large blue stone where they sat side by side. The sloping hills were coloured with a myriad of flowers in full bloom, and here and there the little butterflies were flitting, and appeared to be telling every flower the current news. Looking down the slopes, all that met their eyes was tranquil and enchanting. From the long mountain ridges came the voices of the grass cutters, while down in the village they heard the sounds of axes; someone was building a stable for a new-born calf. In the fields below, the gleaners and threshers were loud in their jokes and quarrels. Moving across the pure sky, white clouds slipped past, and there were flocks of wild geese in formation.

These two young people had eaten mountain fruits when hungry, and drunk spring water when thirsty, and they had taken words and smiles to feed their souls. They had sung a thousand songs and spoken ten thousand words on all the sweet things that the sunlight touches.

But when the sun began to sink at last, they felt something lacking and inexpressible in their lives, and when dusk was drawing near, the mooing of the calves on the slopes sent their hearts shivering.

The will of the gods was raised against the traditional customs,

and so at that time they could no longer tolerate the devilish restrictions which were placed on human beings. It may be wise to be rational, but it is also useless. And so they lost their powers of reason and utterly surrendered themselves, and now in a new way they realised the strength of their love for one another, and finally achieved the satisfaction of exchanging one soul for another, and keeping it deep in their hearts. At last they trembled and fainted, became dumb and grew silent. Happiness had exhausted them in a single moment: they fell asleep.

The man awoke first, and in thinking of his changing happiness, he forgot the future. The girl, for the very reason of being a girl instinctively realized the penalty that would be demanded of them for disobeying the traditions; and this was why she had never even imagined that the young chieftain would ask her into his home. At their age, indeed, they were too young to live anywhere except in the Garden of Eden and they were unfit to live in "a world which thinks only of tomorrows."

However, they had reached the age when they should have been amenable to the customs of the place where they belonged.

"Is love something aloof from the world?" This new meditation threw the young chieftain into a silence as dumbfounded as a stone under the moon.

Seeing him silent, the girl knew he was tormented, and in a feigned happy voice she called to him tenderly and earnestly, beseeched him to be merry, now that they had reason to be merry:

You, who sing so sweetly,
Pray that your voice shall break open the white
clouds in the sky.
Let the moon fall when she has to fall;
Yet now she must ride overhead.

And it was true that there was a thin cloud veiling the face of the moon, dimming all things around. Their hearts were heavy with forebodings.

The chieftain's only son raised his voice:

I cannot live without the sun.
It is death to live without you.
I have no wish to be Emperor or King,
And would rather be your slave for ever.

The girl said:

"This world permits marriage but forbids our loving."

"There should be another world for us to live in. Let us go into the far away, to the place where the sun rises."

"Will you not want your oxen, your horses, your orchards,

your fields, your gowns of fox-fur and your cushions of tiger-skin ?"

"With you by my side, I want nothing else. You are everything—you are my light and my heat, my spring waters, my fruits and all the ten thousand things. In order to be near you always, I must go from the world."

Thinking of all the places they knew, there was not one where they could take refuge. In the south lay the great country of the Hans, who would kill them as aborigines. No, he dared not go south. To the west lay an endless range of deserted mountains occupied by tigers, leopards and other fierce animals. He dared not go west. To the north lay the tribesmen's territory, where every village kept the fiendish law, and they had the right to deal as they pleased with exiles. Only to the east lay the place where the sun and the moon rise, and since the sun was righteous and without prejudice, it was reasonable to believe that the place must be one of peace and justice.

But now an old legend began to revive in the memory of the young chieftain—the sun had scorched the first tribesman to death. Ever since this story had come into existence none of the tribesmen had ventured to go east and live a life no longer ruled by traditional laws. The tribesmen possessed an ancient song in which human desire, a desire which contained all the significance of life and which each man who wanted to live must possess, was interpreted in terms of death, indicating that the greed for life could only be satisfied in death. Death alone, which overcame all things, alone could overcome Fate.

There was no world of pure justice on earth, but there was such a world in the air and under the ground; and the spaces of Heaven were limited, while the underworld was boundlessly wide. And this the tribesmen believed more readily, for they had never heard of a dead man being revived, nor heard that the dead filled the halls of the underworld. So every tribesman believed in an eternal life, and so there often occurred cases of solitary suicide or even double suicide, and these would occur whenever lovers feared that they would be unable to find one another afterwards.

No Yu thought of the other world and smiled happily. He asked the girl whether she would travel to that place where people go and never return. And she, after a moment of meditation, raised her head and looked at the moon which had reappeared among the clouds.

Everywhere the water flows,
Everywhere the fire burns,
And as the moon shines in all places,
So will I go where my love reaches.

And saying this, she laid herself against his breast, closed her eyes and awaited the kiss that would determine her death. Then No Yu drew out a knife, and from a hole in the jewelled handle he took out a small poisonous pill as large as a wood-oil seed. He put it in his mouth, and as it dissolved he kissed the girl and drew the poison into her mouth. Gladly they swallowed the medicine which would join their lives, and smiling they lay down on the blue stone bed covered with wild flowers, which had already withered, waiting for the poison to take effect.

The moon faded away behind the clouds.

* * *

ANSWERS to THE GAME'S THE THING on page 23

1. *Ivanhoe, the victor of the jousting combat, in "Ivanhoe" by Sir Walter Scott.*
2. *Young Lovell's bride and the guests, who played the game hide and seek in the ballad "The Mistletoe Bough" by Thomas Haynes Bayly.*
3. *Mr. Winkle, skating in "The Pickwick Papers" by Charles Dickens.*
4. *The duel between Viola and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in "Twelfth Night" by William Shakespeare.*
5. *The successful gambler in the lyric "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo" by Fred Gilbert.*
6. *The race between the hare and the tortoise in Aesop's Fables.*
7. *Croquet, played by the Court in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll.*
8. *Rat and Mole, sculling in "The Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame.*
9. *Liza Dolittle, taken in hand by Professor Higgins in "Pygmalion" by Bernard Shaw.*
10. *John Peel the huntsman, in the song "John Peel" by John Woodcock Graves.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Gaped. 4, Esperanto. 8, Lunatic. 9, Painted. 10, Isis. 11, Small. 12, Cran. 15, Fortune teller. 17, Impossibility. 20, Sink. 21, Pagan. 22, Cram. 25, Leakage. 26, Imitate. 27, Detention. 28, Humid.

Down. 1, Gallipoli. 2, Pontiff. 3, Date. 4, Excommunicate. 5, Rain. 6, Natural. 7, Olden. 9, Pulverisation. 13, Crash. 14, Begin. 16, Recommend. 18, Pendant. 19, Yard-arm. 20, Solid. 23, Barn. 24, Dish.

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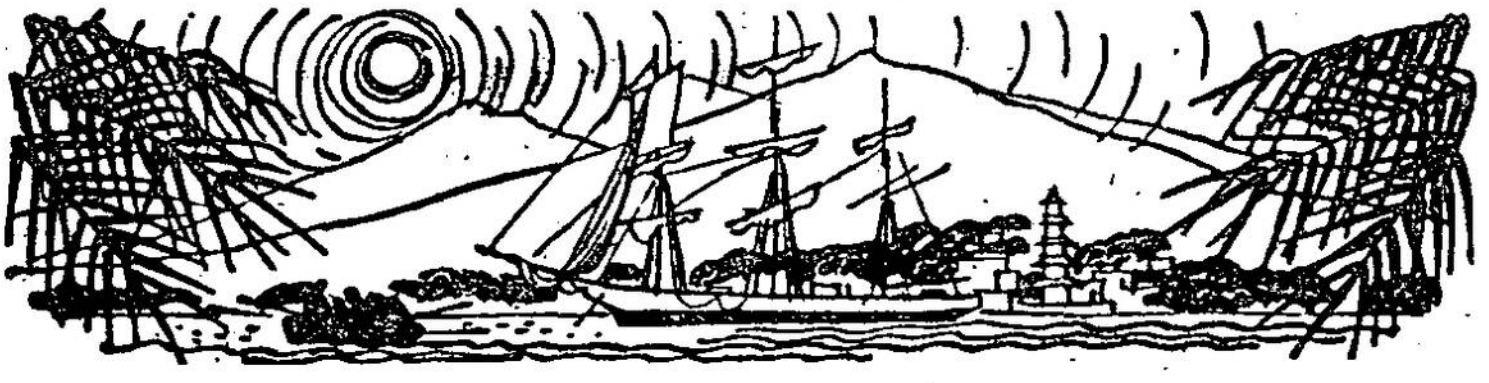

by GARLAND ROARK

I, TOM FLINT, DID NOT BOARD THE SHIP UNTIL 1885, FOUR YEARS AFTER THE NATURAL OPENING OF THIS STORY. NOR HAD I HEARD MUCH ABOUT THE GREAT SQUARE-RIGGER OTHER THAN PRAISE FOR HER LINES, HER SPEED AND GRACE IN WATER, AND THAT INCIDENT KNOWN AS THE "FIGUREHEAD AFFAIR," WHICH OPENED HER PUBLIC HISTORY AND RAN ITS LENGTH LIKE A LONG BALEFUL SHADOW. SINCE EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWED SEEMED INFLUENCED TO A DEGREE BY THAT INCIDENT, I'LL TELL THAT STORY FIRST:

ON a blustering evening in early December of 1879, Robert Lodge Culver's residence was the destination of a famous naval architect, an East Boston shipbuilder, a banker, two men of the sea, and three members of the Boston shipping firm of Culver and Adams.

Over a glass of whisky one of the old salts said, "This is the happy-weather climax of a ship on paper. Come tomorrow, it looks as though we'll start on her, the Lord and devil willing."

"Aye." The stocky man before the fire spoke. "As always, the Lord and devil willing." He was the host, Robert Culver.

The company felt his presence. His eyes were grey and sharp. Beneath heavy black brows they seemed sharper. His nose was short and straight, and his lips were firm. Black hair and sideburns, together with a ruddy complexion and strong jaw and chin, lent his face vigour and authority. He did not look to be fifty. Seldom did he smile, and when he did there was little warmth in his expression.

Said the banker, "The Lord and devil willing, you say. Why the devil?"

"The Lord and devil stand watch and watch in the stream, Mr. Goodsby," Culver replied. "I should know."

A pleasant laugh from a chair near that of the banker allowed each man a moment of respite from the stern eye of the host. "Since she'll cost a pretty penny, sir, let's not build the devil into her."

"As you wish, Amos," Culver replied, softening his face into a semblance of a smile. The man called Amos was the firm's vice-president, a handsome man with blond hair and a winning smile—said by some to be the most valuable smile in Boston. Amos R. De Loach, not turned forty, had been trained by Culver to succeed him at some date far into the future. De Loach, the firm's great salesman and its financial wizard, was a socialite also, an influence in society, as well as in the shipping world.

Amos brought up a whisky glass and suggested they get down to business. Blue-prints were spread out and the naval architect spoke of hand winches, copper sheathing, and a dead rise of three feet.

"Her mainmast will stand one hundred and sixty-seven feet from deck to truck; it'll measure thirty-six inches in diameter, like the foremast. Her standing rigging is to be four-stranded Russian hemp, the fore and main shrouds being twelve inches in circumference."

Culver's eyes, pensive, seemed to see a rival shipowner's despairing face as the Culver-Adams ensign mounted the monkey gaff, ran up, and snapped forward in a swift passing.

Talk engendered talk; they built her that evening over whisky glasses. Only the question, "What'll ye name 'er, Cap'n Culver?" from the more shrivelled of the two salts, evoked a very dead silence. Culver frowned as if offended.

Mr. Goodsby ventured an answer: "Why not call her after Miss Harriet, sir—the *Harriet Adams*?" He did not see Amos's eyebrows lift as he swept Culver with a passing glance.

"Mr. Goodsby," Amos smiled, "I'm afraid you're late with your splendid idea. I have taken the liberty of naming her myself. The *Robert Culver*."

None of them saw the figure in the doorway. She smiled as her lips formed the words, "The *Robert Culver*." To Harriet Adams, a girl of sixteen blossoming into lovely womanhood, the honour dear Amos bestowed upon Mr. Culver seemed very proper. She thought of herself as a woman of twenty-two; when she reached that age, she would be the biggest factor in the firm by virtue of her father's shares. She sighed, saying to herself:

"But it's just as well they have honoured him now."

She turned away unseen and moved slowly up the steps, thinking of Mr. Goodsby's suggestion: the *Harriet Adams*. She felt dull disappointment which she refused to admit as she passed her aunt Emily's room. She retraced her steps, opened the door to her aunt's parlour, and looked in.

"They've named the ship, Aunt Emily."

The matronly, rosy-cheeked little lady lifted her face from a book, removed her reading glasses, and snapped, "So they did." It was

her way of asking the name.

"Yes, the *Robert Culver*."

"A good name," she said, fitting her glasses to her nose again. Harriet agreed.

At midnight glasses were raised. "To the *Robert Culver*," said the banker. "May she be the fastest and luckiest wind-driven vessel ever to slide down the ways."

IN the months that followed, the ship on paper grew out of a blueprint: she arched her ribs and made ready for the thousands of pounds of oak, pine, and copper necessary to a thoroughbred's endurance; she accepted fine weathery lines which beautifully concealed her toughness.

Robert Culver watched her blossom in the moulds; he patted her affectionately from cutwater to fantail. He waited impatiently for the breath of life they would breathe into her. He became so very attached to her that he flung salty imprecations at carpenters in the act of laying a warped deck plank. He, once Captain Culver of the *Barnacle Goose*, saw a ship that would work up to windward against storms of hellish force; a ship with towering masts and gigantic yards moving at a clip under taut cotton duck; a ship with air breathed into her great sails, her forefoot forward in a downhill sea until she was hull under horizon to the Orient, a roaring *Robert Culver*, the only possible twin congruous to the man whose name she would carry.

During the twenty-two months between blueprint and launching, there was ample time and opportunity for De Loach and a few of Culver's friends to plan the only part of the ship not ordered by him. Whenever Culver had mentioned a figurehead there had always been a hurried change of topic. He had been quick to fathom the hushed wind, to learn that the figurehead would be their, or rather Amos's, surprise in his honour; so he said no more about it, though he heard a word here and there, enough to justify his fondest hopes.

Amos De Loach commissioned a carver from Maine to do the likeness of Robert Culver for the ship's stemhead. The bearded artist, a Mr. Augustus Teale, had earned a reputation for this work in the past; his long hair, dreamy eyes, and breath reeking with alcohol were accepted as symbols of his artistry. He met De Loach while drinking, and he drank while studying the many pictures of the subject, and he was quite drunk when he accepted a liberal cash advance from Amos.

He was counting the crisp bank notes with an eye that measured his wealth in demijohns when his stout wife relieved him of the money. In the argument that followed, she struck him over the head with a wooden mallet, thereby paralyzing the professional brain to such an extent that even she was later heard to voice regret.

As time wore on, Mr. Teale eyed his work owlishly, sucked at a bottle, and frowned at the wooden image of Robert Culver, who peered out over the waves, hands on chest, long coat flying back in the breeze. The figure was less like Culver and more like some

fourth-dimensional visitor. Mrs. Teale, her arms folded across a heavy bosom, one eye squinted shut, advised her spouse to whittle here and shave there; she even fetched him another bottle. But the carver despised the task. He drank more and cursed Culver for the spell he had cast.

Then, either crazed by drink or the awful shock of an art lost to him, or both, he shut himself off from any visitor and indulged in a spree lasting a fortnight.

But he finished the figurehead, a massive piece against a background of fluid scrolls, and he laid the paint on white and thick. Then he boxed the work and swore that no man would ever see it until the damned thing was fastened to the ship's bow at the fitting-out berth.

A CROWD of some fifteen thousand Bostonians gathered to witness the debut of the "finest ship ever built." Engraved invitations had been sent to the Governor as well as other high dignitaries of state and city; newsmen, and ladies and gentlemen of fashion in all their pomp and dignity, and a brass band on a flag-bedecked platform, all lent the occasion versatility and colour. While before them stood a great ship about to be born formally.

The gathering seated in a broad semicircle about her starboard bow saw outer perfection. Her hull, a glossy reddish brown, was broken just beneath her chains by a broad stripe of bright red which ran her around; masts, yards, her every spar, including bowsprit and jib boom, were finished in natural colour under deep layers of varnish; her deckhouses, from forecastle to wheelhouse, were white, and her every rope and furled sail exuded a virgin creamy tan—she was clean, fresh, and wondrously alive. Fifty men berthed before her mast. The *Robert Culver* was nothing short of a sensation.

The band struck up a lively nautical piece when Robert Culver, Harriet, and Emily alighted from an open carriage. A buzz ran through the crowd and every eye turned to view the owner and his companions.

Culver carried himself erect; he wore a black silk hat and a set smile. His ruddy face, lean, sharp-eyed, irreversibly jawed, and iron-lipped, seemed to reach up for some exquisite rung in a ladder of lordship; the man then seemed to sit atop his throne. Here was power, and here was open recognition of, and solid tribute to that power. He made an attempt at softening his face as he turned to view the ship, a symbol of his wealth and fame.

And there on the bow awaiting an unveiling was a statue of a great man—himself.

But all attention was not his: the girl beside him claimed her share. She was Harriet Adams, a future power in the firm.

Harriet, just turned eighteen, seemed a mature woman. Her large violet-blue eyes and oval face were alive with a controlled spontaneity; she was quick to inspire moments of wonder and admiration. Her gaze fell soft, clear, and direct; and her nose, slightly uptilted, seemed made to order by a precision artist who modelled with the same

inspired skill that had created her eyes and lips. Her hair was a wavy brown.

She wore a white dress which barely covered her rounded bosom. Cut to emphasize her slim waist, it ran on down in a maze of ruffles, past shapely hips and projecting bustle. Harriet, like her mother before her, was accepted by the most censorious ladies, many of whom were in attendance that day only because of her.

As the band played, her eyes were drawn to an arresting face. It was handsome after a fashion, though bold. She swept it with a glance, then another. As the eyes of the man continued to pierce her she leaned to Robert Culver with a question.

Culver glanced about slowly, at last replying: "Captain Boll of the *Lydia Case*. They call him the Striker."

She wanted to ask why he was called the Striker, though she fixed her eyes on the bandstand instead.

The ceremony was getting under way. One man arose after another in flowery speech. Then the mayor brought the moment around. The canvas about the figurehead was made ready for removal as he talked; his subject was Robert Lodge Culver.

"—A man as endemically salty as the sea. We are here to honour this man, whose dream of a ship stands before us ready to tear through the seas to foreign lands, a credit to a great man of Boston, a credit to the great city of Boston, and its rôle in world commerce.

"May the good Lord bless her." The mayor was windy; he drove on, at last into a climax: "Thus we are about to view the likeness of a great Bostonian, Robert Lodge Culver, who built her; his face and soul will ever guide her over the waves. It is as it should be. Soon we shall all walk up her gangway and visit the deck and interior of the great ship."

Harriet felt the bold eyes of Captain Boll.

"And now, before I order the unveiling of the figurehead, will the men who planned this fitting honour please stand?" The banker, Amos De Loach, two seamen, the builder, and several influential men stood.

"And the great artist, Mr. Augustus Teale—will you come forward, please?" After an interval of awkward silence, for Mr. Teale had his own reasons for not being there, the mayor signalled the bandmaster. The rising notes of the overture sounded; a roll of the drums, and higher notes, and the cymbals crashed.

Then the canvas was torn loose.

Hands ready to applaud relaxed slowly, tensely; mouths ready to open for cheers were struck dumb. Faces pivoted on craning necks to ask in silence for some verification or denial of a shocking fact.

The mayor's words echoed in every ear: "Thus we are about to view the likeness of a great Bostonian, Robert Culver—" And the likeness: it was a hideous dragon-bird with a long lumpy neck, boxy body, and stubby claws; only the wings relieved the figure of over-all grotesqueness; in another-glance they stressed the hideousness of the figurehead.

The air was tense and electric; and embarrassment went without

any balm of relief. The tall, handsome De Loach stood paralyzed, unable to remove his horrified eyes from the dragon-bird.

Robert Culver stood with one hand across his chest, the other behind him. He did not so much as close a hand into a fist, and he stood as erect and calm as before the overture. His face was a mask: his forehead seemed no longer than usual, his eyes no sharper, his frown no deeper; there was no loss or gain of colour—he peered as if in deep study of some impersonal effrontery out of a face he had long since trained into hardness.

Harriet bit at her lip, then turned to her aunt. But Aunt Emily, her face showing red splotches, as it did when she was angered, was talking in low tones to Robert Culver. Harriet heard her say: "Laugh, Robert—for God's sake laugh!"

Had Robert Culver followed her advice, he would have chosen the proper mood of the moment. Boston would have laughed with him over a huge joke, before following him on board to the waiting reception. And as for the future, his own, as well as those in the palm of his powerful hand, his merest chuckle at that moment would have saved immeasurable grief.

Robert Culver reached into his pocket for a cigar. He lit it calmly; then, as if nothing had happened, he took his leave with Emily and Harriet. No one spoke to him, and only one man followed the trio to the carriage.

He was Captain Boll of the *Lydia Case.*

He stood at the carriage, his long fingers on the top of the wheel, his tall figure erect, and his slitted eyes boring deep. He did not look at Emily, nor did he look at Mr. Culver; his eyes, bold, or wicked, or both, held fast to Harriet in what seemed a disrobing stare.

Culver, either used to the vagaries of a captain of Boll's reputation, or his mind on the "image" of himself, was less observing than Harriet and Emily. Harriet blushed, and Emily made ready to speak sharply. Then Boll, as if oblivious of a sudden to the presence of women, said to Robert Culver:

"A damn dirty trick, sir."

That was the "Figurehead Affair," except for a puzzling anti-climax that came later in the day. It was several years later that I learned of this incident.

AT four that afternoon, Pierce, the butler, advised Harriet of a caller, a Captain Boll, to see her. She frowned, asking if her aunt were downstairs, only to be told that Aunt Emily was out. Harriet, left alone, could only meet or refuse to meet the captain. She nodded to Pierce and, after a few minutes, she descended the stairs, suspecting some consoling remark about the shocking affair of the morning, that or a seaman's ingratiating bid designed for Mr. Culver's ear.

He bowed as she entered the parlour, then held out his hand. "Miss Adams, the quickest way to meet you was to come straight here." He did not release her hand, though the grasp of his eyes seemed the stronger. At a loss for reply in a situation entirely new

to her, she was silent.

" So I'm here," he said. He did not smile; rather, he looked deep behind her eyes. She frowned and bit her lip, seeking some avenue of escape from an utterly bewildering and awkward plight. There was nothing in her schooling to aid her here; he smiled then as if he knew this. Her anger flared, but only for a moment.

He said, " The *Robert Culver* is likely to give your firm trouble, Miss Adams."

" Yes ? " she said, relieved. " Won't you sit down, Captain Boll ? "

" Thanks, I'll stand." He released her hand and she moved to a chair. " When they put a three-foot dead rise in a ship, they rob cargo space for speed. But Mr. Culver rigged her with hemp and sparred her with wood. He's slowed her. And she'll require too many men before the mast for economical handling."

" Mr. Culver attends to such matters," she replied. Then she asked the question uppermost in her mind : " Why did you come to me ? "

" Because Mr. Culver is too hardheaded for me to tell him what I've told you."

" There's little I can do, sir."

" True," he replied. " But by the time Mr. Culver admits he's built a liability, you will be able to do something about it." He grinned, his bold eyes mocking her, it seemed. " I'm in no hurry."

She sat up, truly surprised at the long bid this strange man made : she could not hope to govern her fifty-one per cent of the Culver and Adams stock for four years.

" Surely, sir, you are not serious." She laughed, rising.

He advanced until he stood close. " I was never more serious." As she raised her brows a trifle, he said, " And you'll remember that I'm serious." It sounded like a threat. It was.

He took her in his arms and kissed her fiercely. She trembled in fear even as she tried to reconcile a warm, strange surge which crept over her.

Suddenly he stood apart from her. " Now I don't think you'll forget that I'm serious, Miss Adams."

With that, he moved to the door with the stride of a king, leaving in his wake a stunned and angry girl who admitted the truth of the words : she would not soon forget !

IN December of 'eighty-one the *Robert Culver* sailed from New York with a cargo of oil for Shanghai. Under a Captain Lawter, a timid master, she was almost dismasted in making her easting to St. Paul. Four men lost their lives on that voyage. She was pooped on her second voyage, and a mate lost his mind. On her third run, under a Captain St. Charles, she leaked up to nine inches an hour for long months. The crew pumped themselves into living skeletons. The ship knew trouble, she was trouble itself : she lost time and fat cargo runs ; she took lives. The *Robert Culver* seemed to invite contrary winds, adverse currents, and spells of doldrums, as well

as storms. She lost underwriters' greasy slaps on the back, and she gained their curses. She was jinxed, they said.

She was a murderess, a pattern for hellships.

Culver's closest friends, old seamen who didn't mind his gruff airs, told him repeatedly: "Change her name. Change her colour, her personality, and put a man aboard her who'll get along with her." There was sound logic in the last remark: a thorough understanding between ship and captain was nothing short of a prerequisite to profit.

"There's Boll of the *Lydia Case*. He's a driver, and more. He'll tame a ship if he has to drive every spar and mast out of her."

Culver listened, saying little or nothing. Amos De Loach, the former favourite, had, of course, been banished long ago. Culver took what he had heard home and, at dinner each evening, he repeated all to Emily. Harriet listened. Then one evening she repeated what Boll had told her about the ship's faults to Emily.

"And where, Harriet, child, did you learn so much about ships?"

"Why—from Captain Boll." Aunt Emily sat erect and glared accusingly.

"He came to tell me on the day of the ceremony, Auntie."

"To tell *you!* You? And how did the uncouth creature gain entrance here?"

"I allowed it."

"What else did he say?"

"That by the time Mr. Culver admitted he'd built a liability, I'd be able to do something about it."

Emily laughed. "The scoundrel has a long eye."

That evening she said to Culver, "Send for this Captain Boll, Robert."

Boll came. Sensing in full Culver's predicament, he talked in bold terms: "I'll take her under these conditions—that her rigging be changed from hemp to steel wire, that she be sparred with steel." Culver balked at what seemed unnecessary expense, and Boll, smiling cynically, stood to go. It was Emily who asked him to stay and Culver to consider the advisability of Boll's demands. Culver at last agreed to meet the requirements, which evoked the captain's next words:

"Then I'll sail her—for a quarter interest in her earnings."

Culver arose, his face empurpled, his voice militant. "Young man, you're either an upstart or a rogue."

"Then let De Loach and the shipping world continue to laugh at you." Boll smiled. "Or, if you want to turn the laugh on them, do as I say—change her name to the *Gerrymander* and put me aboard."

"They want me to sell her," Culver said. "They want me to remove the figurehead. I hate her too much to do either! She's going to pay, and pay, and pay, until I bleed her of every cent she'll earn—until I rob her of self-respect." He got up out of his chair, his face a study in passion, and clenched his hands into bloodless fists. "Then I'll carry her down as a scoundrel degrades a virtuous woman! And only I know her fate in the end!"

Captain Boll smiled. His expression was penetrating and astute

he saw Culver's sensitive soul revealed to its last secret refuge; and he, Boll, the driving captain—called the Striker because of his uncanny dispatch in meeting with problem or opportunity—stored the gain of that meeting in his patient head for future use.

His chuckle was a gloating sound, it seemed, when Culver said, "I think you're just the man I want aboard that ship."

ALONG the water-front in Boston, Culver's animosity towards the ship became an item of public gossip. He had never so much as set foot on the ship since that day of the ceremony. There was quite a stir with the news that Captain Boll was her new master; and a ripple of laughter, and a wealth of superstitious predictions with the change of her name plate. *Robert Culver* was removed. In its place there appeared: *Gerrymander*.

It was in late December of 'eighty-four, after Boll had run the ship to her first year of profit, that I put into Boston from Liverpool on the *Cape Race*, a four-masted barque belonging to De Loach and Company. I had no more than got her to her moorings than Amos De Loach came aboard. He had something to say, and we retired to my quarters to raise a glass and talk. He was quick to the point in his usual unhurried manner, and it was not long before I sat up with surprise and interest written all over my face.

De Loach had said: "Captain Flint, I want you to stow your captain's licence for a time."

I searched my mind for any error on my part before asking if I had failed to show him profit with the barque. "No," he said. "It's not that. Nor am I thinking of demoting you. Rather, you'll do better with what I have in mind."

He launched forth into a bitter account of Culver's perfidy, as he called it. Then he said:

"Culver's big. I'm small. And since I helped keep him big, I think I'm justified in wanting a wrong righted." He leaned close, his eyes flashing a determination steeped in the memory of a wrong done him. "I want to steal his cargoes out from under him, slow his shipping, and eat at his profits from the inside."

I smiled dubiously and asked, "What's really on your mind?"

He studied me closely, then said, "What I really want is the *Gerrymander*, Flint. Yes, I want her for two reasons. First, she'll give me the big ship I need to open up the Orient run; but that's business, and of the head. Now here it is straight from the heart—I want the *Gerrymander* because she showed me the true Robert Culver who was supposedly my best friend. I want her caught in her own illegality; and this Captain Boll is a man who'll furnish that opportunity, I'm thinking. There's a partnership awaiting you, Flint, if you can do the job."

"A partnership," I dreamed aloud. "Why, I'd almost scuttle a ship for that. So you want me to sail under Captain Boll."

"As a mate," he said. "Second mate. You'll have a better opportunity to sway the crew to your side—if necessary."

I lifted my brows and said it. "Mutiny?"

" Success, Flint "—he smiled—" any way you care to go about it."

" Very well," I said. " I'll try it. But you seem to underestimate Captain Boll."

" Quite the opposite," De Loach replied. " He's a man who worships Boll and a dollar. And it's rumoured that he has a scheme afoot by which he hopes to strike it rich. Confidentially, Flint, it's more than a rumour. I don't know much about it, but it's a scheme that might embarrass Robert Culver."

I frowned. " Well, shouldn't I know a little about it ? "

" Naturally. But let Boll tell you. He'll need help, and if you show initiative and a stubborn head, I'm convinced he'll talk to you. That's Boll, Flint, through and through, a man who respects the strong and despises the weak."

That sounded logical, I admitted. " Well, suppose we succeed in getting the *Gerrymander*, what then ? "

He laughed. " I'll paint her figurehead a bright red, Flint. And I'll rename her the *Robert Culver*. Then I'll sit back and see whom Boston laughs at last."

I didn't laugh. Perhaps I didn't understand such a far-reaching grudge as he and Culver knew and nourished. I was busy sorting out wrongs and antidotes when he got up, reached into his pocket, and tossed an odd coin atop the table.

" The *Gerrymander*'s bosun, an old seas-under salt named Wulsin, dropped it at a bar a few days back. Keep it for luck, Flint."

I studied the coin. It was about the size of a dollar, and very light. Its collar was crenated, and there was a square hole in it just off centre. But what opened my eyes wide with curiosity was the replica of the *Gerrymander*'s figurehead on one side, and the two words on the other side :

GERRYMANDER CASH.

THE horizon seemed to stand off in an effort to work its way around us, and the stretch of abandoned sea in which the *Gerrymander* lay was so very still it served only as a mirror to the blue dome overhead. The helm was minus any pulse on that late April afternoon of 'eighty-five. Not a rope stirred, and all sails hung limp.

We had tacked ship in the roomy South Atlantic in an excellent run from Boston, and now we sat becalmed at thirty-six degrees south, with Tristan da Cunha a hundred miles south-east of us, the tip of Africa a good two thousand miles due east, and the fierce winds of the roaring forties below us. The doldrums held us.

" A wind, Lucifer. Put a wind where it belongs," Captain Boll said over and over, throwing nickels, dimes, and quarters into the thankless sea. The coins sailed over the rail, glistening in the sun before striking the water in hollow splashes. Then he cursed sea and calm, and the devil for his obstinacy, showering the sea with more coins as he did so.

" A leading wind, Lucifer." Our raw apprentices, who had never so much as heard of a sailor whistling for a wind, let alone a captain's bid for one with money and curses, peered over the sides as if expecting

a host of creatures with long arms to reach up and suck the ship under.

Captain Boll was not a man easily met. It would require a century, I thought, to fathom him to his mainspring. In the meantime he was himself, not some veiled projection of the man, as his passions scrambled behind the cold hostility of granite-grey eyes. I guessed him to be about thirty-five. His nose was sharp and straight, his lips thin and determined. A pointed chin, long jaw, and long forehead under coal-black hair completed his face except for a fact one could not but realize—there was an extravagant quality of self-reliance, inscrutability, and uncanny strength in the blend of his features. He stood the poop, tall, tanned, wide-shouldered, and heavy-biceped. A remarkable man, or force; either sufficed.

A dime struck the rail, fell to the poop, and rolled to the main deck. An apprentice with a look of delicacy on his face fell to the deck in getting out of its path, as if he expected it to burn its way into the deck planking.

Mr. Cott, the chief mate, a tall emaciated Yankee with drooping lids and over-all sensuous expression, never moved a muscle; nor did the stocky, sad-faced bosun, Mr. Wulsin. Both were veterans of some years under Boll. Mr. Cott was just what his face depicted, a man of skilled nautical talent and a flair for brutality. Old Wulsin remained a drunkard, an antiquated piece of flesh, and otherwise a mystery. But they were quite used to the contrarieties of Boll the Striker. The pressing silence, more than Boll's foolish ostentation, told of the presence of some unimagined evil. A cabin boy seemed unusually excited; Jason Blue, an ex-convict, scowled; and one lad of sixteen chewed at a nail on a shaking finger, his eyes darting strangely up into the rigging. Had Captain Boll turned to them and said, "Men, we'll all step over the rail," I think the majority would have obeyed.

Boll's fist was before his face as he stared at the glittering western seam of earth and sky. "A howling wind!" It was his only departure from calm.

The moment seemed made to order for me. Tom Flint was not aboard the *Gerrymander* by accident. It was my moment, one in which I could serve the crew as well as De Loach—I wanted Boll's measuring eye, if merely for the sake of closer acquaintance. But call it recognition.

I chuckled so he could hear me. His eye came round, sharp.

He studied me fiercely for long moments. He seemed to require time for transporting his mind from hell to deck, then time in which to place me into the knit of reality. Soon he saw the physical Tom Flint, a man of twenty-eight, a little off six foot, with short, strong brown hair and steady washed-blue eyes.

"Mr. Flint," he said with sinister ease, "did you ever shinny up a mast?"

"Aye, sir."

"Then you'll shinny aloft and repair a bowline bridle on the main-royal."

There was little reason for any word about the coat of grease on the mast, or the mention of easier methods of reaching for that towering fifth sail, or the very fact that not a bowline bridle on any sail needed repair, or that I was a ship's officer. There was, instead, every reason for complaisance. Boll was a stickler for ship's discipline. I had long respected from a side-line his reputation as it strutted pompously by, sometimes loud, sometimes hushed.

" Sir," I replied, " I signed aboard as second, not as a Sumatra monkey," causing Mr. Wulsin to shake his old head sadly. The cook, an ex-pugilist from New Orleans, chewed liquorice and spat its juice lustily, and Mr. Cott opened wide his left eye without affecting the set droop of the other ; the steward, Lugo Giacomo, whom we called the " Boot ", sighed heavily. Jason Blue, our admitted criminal, remained silent, attentive, as did Reeder, a big, hard-faced man of thirty-two.

" Mr. Flint, I'm losing my patience."

" Aye, sir," I said with veiled insolence. " But a man who hasn't any patience with God and weather can't have much with a lowly second."

A twinkle of Boll's eyes said he would reserve me for a very private plumbing.

Little Ahab spat again, and old Wulsin sighed. The lads who ran the rigging, most of them in their beardless teens, emitted glances which emphasized their youthful lack of comprehension as they eyed the greased mast, then Boll, and me. Chess, my favourite apprentice, a curly-haired boy of twelve with big soft brown eyes, seemed to gaze from the captain to me over a teething ring.

I heard Wulsin's low words : " The second'll back down—thank the Lord." But I wasn't giving an inch. I had merely put myself up for due consideration. It was the first brush, but then a ship's sails must meet a wind for the first time, her hull the brine. Every experience has its virginity, its rape, and its memory, and I was learning the advantages or disadvantages, as well as the pain, joy, and curiosity, of rape as his eyes dug deeper into mine.

" Steward, fetch my rifle." In due time Lugo was back with it.

Mr. Wulsin groaned aloud : " May the Lord and St. Ebenezer of Singapore have mercy."

I chuckled, aware that no captain, even Boll, could force himself into such awkward behaviour.

Captain Boll held the rifle, and my eye. Chess, his big brown eyes bulging, uttered a little cry of protest. The gun had not been raised. But now it moved up quickly. There was a sharp report, and the sail leaped up in a short quiver as its starboard edge was perforated.

" Mr. Flint, the bowline bridle needs repair. Take your time. It will give us both something to think about on this voyage."

He turned about and prayed to the devil for his wind. Minutes later I looked up and saw Chess trying his hand at repairing that bowline bridle. Boll, too, saw him, which meant trouble ahead.

Boll got his wind. It roared in at about three bells on the second watch that afternoon. The blustering anti-trades sent a mild advance

breath, first from directly out of the north, and then bearing out of the west with squalls, sleet, and harder winds. Before the lights of Tristan da Cunha blinked under the blanket of fog over our starboard, he held to good driving canvas. The devil had come through with a wind.

On deck that night, she pulled ten knots under full topsails and upper topgallants. Then I heard the order from Mr. Cott's bellows, which meant we would wear steadily to the south under all the sail she could carry. " Down to the drift ice," he said with hellish pleasure to the lads with feet up in the sail stirrups. " The Striker puts a ship through. Aye, ye'll be in the sails when the green hits the yardarms. When the sail ye're trimmin' will slap you down while ye're takin' in. Aye." He laughed hatefully, adding, " Ye'll be settin' the royals next ! "

I frowned at the threatened press of canvas. " Damn little sail the Old Man will keep fluted," I mused. My frown held as I drew a visible definition of a hellship : fifty men should berth before the mast ; we shipped twenty-five. Twenty-five to do the work of fifty on a big full-rigged three-sticker ! Hell was in the offing.

My observation was cut short. The captain wanted me.

Soon I entered his cabin, stopped short, and raised a brow significantly : there sat Chess. He seemed to sigh as I entered, and he kept sending those big eyes my way beseechingly. He was unusually serious for a youngster of twelve as he turned his cap in his hands.

Said Boll, " Sit down, Mr. Flint. I have here a man who acted against orders. He repaired the bowline bridle when the second mate failed to do it." He eyed me narrowly.

His quarters seemed designed for a king. In addition to an ornate wall desk, a round table and chairs of polished mahogany, there were three excellent oils in massive frames. The central picture was of a square-rigger in a blow. On the left, a portrait of a man caught and held my eye. He was Robert Culver. Despite the artist's attempt at softening him, his face seemed to carry more storm than the seascape.

The third picture was of Harriet Adams. Her beauty caught and held me. I forgot Boll and Chess as I studied her with more admiration than I realized. Her eyes looked straight into mine, as do the eyes of any portrait, as if she wished to stare me down. I found it hard to look away.

" Come here, boy," Boll ordered. Chess gulped once or twice as he advanced bravely. " Since you acted without orders today, tell me what I should do with you."

" Sir," Chess replied, contriving a weak smile, " you've already scared the bloody hell out of me." The boy was learning to talk like a sailor, I observed ; pity his tongue before we reached Java Head.

Boll asked casually enough, " Did you ever ride a bosun's chair, boy ? "

" No, sir."

" I don't mean above deck, boy."

" N-no, sir."

I said, " Aren't you going a little far, sir ? "

"The crew seems to think it can take liberties aboard this ship," he said, facing me. "It's too bad the new men don't know me." He studied me, then Chess, and his words seemed too painstakingly rehearsed for any quick decision. "It's about time all of us got acquainted. We will, and soon, boy. You're going to ride a bosun's chair over the side."

I was sure he jested, since few grown men could stand such a ride as he suggested in a rough sea. The *Gerrymander* sat solid with case oil, and her ten knots threw up furrows and running seas down her sides in good weather; but choppy, snarling swells at a driving ten made bosun's chair riding more than perilous.

The lad smiled in sickly fashion and turned his cap over and over as he heard the verdict; his chin quivered perceptibly, and his eyes seemed to shrink timidly from an acceptance of the fact. "I'd rather n-not, sir."

Boll sent for Mr. Cott. When the mate arrived, he asked the reading of the log line. "Eleven, sir, and the wind is hauling into the south'ard."

"Mr. Cott, I want a bosun's chair swung from a davit on the port-side. Have it ready to lower away." Mr. Cott merely grinned as he glanced from the boy to me. His hanging lids twitched, and his Adam's apple bobbed in a long ugly neck.

We moved to the deck. On block and tackle from a davit was a bosun's chair, a board slung by a rope and used as a seat for work aloft and over the sides. Chess was ordered to sit in it. He obeyed, holding grimly to the line. Nor did he whimper as Boll lowered away.

It is difficult for a landsman to grasp the full gravity of such a situation. Unless one considers the force of a running sea and matches a mere lad against such a restless Goliath, the punishment fails to register deeply. But here was more than penalty inflicted on an offender; here was a gamble with death.

The water hit him, hard. At eleven knots, two more than many men will dare in an easy sea, he was forced to fight hard to sit upright. He lost here, however. I saw him, a red-lacquered marine animal in the glint of the port-side riding light, smothered in sea and foam. He came out of it flattened and gasping and hanging on for dear life. Then another wave swallowed him, and the spray lifted to sting faces away up on deck.

He was up because the sea dropped from under him; he hung in mid-air, a feeble youth between his past and hereafter, but only for a moment. A smother of foam, blood-tinted from the ship's light, devoured him.

I felt Boll's eye on me. I glanced at him, careful to evince no feeling; rather, I sought out his expression as Lugo the Boot waved a greasy note and clamoured for a wager—he said the lad wouldn't last out another ducking. Said Boll, "What's on your mind, Mr. Flint?"

"I could be wondering who's sitting on a bench in the Common," I said easily, gritting my teeth as a black wave climbed the rope supporting Chess all the way to the rail. "Or," I added, straining

for a civil tongue, " I could be asking why a grown man wants to murder a boy."

" You omit the 'sir,' Mr. Flint."

I glared at him then. Boll knew my mind; he dared me with indirect cruelties. It was then I realized that he was less interested in punishing Chess and more in testing Tom Flint.

" Haul him up, Mr. Flint. I'm sure you'll enjoy telling him it was you who saved him." I hauled. I drew in a beaten boy with a belly full of brine; he was almost unconscious, and holding on so fast that it required force to pry his hands from the line. Over my shoulder: " When you've finished your womanish chores, Mr. Flint, report to my cabin."

I did not answer; instead, I lowered my eyes to a miracle, the living Chess.

I waited for my anger to cool before reporting to the Old Man.

Captain Boll sat, elbows on table, cap pushed back, drink in one hand, and pencil in the other. On the varnished round table lay a chart which his pencil point stabbed at St. Paul, a few thousand miles east. He seemed lost in meditation, and he left me standing for some time as he looked right through me.

I used his lengthened silence to study Harriet Adams of the portrait. There was a faint trace of humour about her lips, I thought. Was she a little purist or snob, or was she the true model for the portrait?

Suddenly: " Mr. Flint, we've made an extra day to this point. But I need four more. I'll get them." He looked up at me. " We're going to drive hell out of ship and crew."

" Aye, sir."

He said, " Mr. Wulsin is getting old. I'll trust you to see that he does his job. And Mr. Cott, who is chief mate because Mr. Culver likes him, makes old-womanish excuses in storm weather."

I waited, wondering, " What next? " Soon he said, " It'll be watch and watch most of the way. I'm out to drive this ship up to four hundred miles a day." I continued to wait as he went on: " The *Gerrymander* has a reputation. They say she's a murderess. But I'm pushing her. She's going through.

" Now, Mr. Flint," he said, leaning forward slightly, " I don't know why you gave up a captain's berth to sail under me. But your mistakes of the past don't concern me. It's the ones you make under me. I'll keep my eye on you. If you please me, I can make things very interesting for you. Aye, profitably so."

That was all. I went on deck with a feeling of accomplishment surging through me; that, and a keen desire to work into whatever scheme he had afoot, if it could serve De Loach and me.

FOUR days later our position was forty-six south, fourteen east, and still no legendary roaring winds. Old Wulsin defined our stand in more realistic terms: " Africa on the port-side, the South Pole to starboard, and hell ahead." I wondered more than ever why a driving captain carried such a bosun.

But the weather came on, the big weather of the roaring forties.

gradually but surely. Cape pigeons swarmed about the ship and a few big albatrosses kept us company. It was on the eight-to-midnight watch of the fourth night after Boll had said that it would be hell all the way. The waves were a dozen feet high and climbing higher. The *Gerrymander* rolled a little, but she ran splendidly under fair driving sail. As the wind freshened, I knew the helmsman was unhappy with the pressure aft; he'd have liked to carry the helm nearly amidships for easy steering. Why Mr. Cott didn't see fit to make the crossjack fast in that following wind, I didn't know; nor did I care. He carried her under Cape Horn canvas, except for the unorthodox mizzen sail.

At ten minutes to midnight the bell sounded the warning for the change of watch. At eight bells sharp I took over the ship. The starboard watch is also the captain's, and Boll stood the weather side of the poop on the minute. The wind blew in a near gale by then.

I had all hands busy for hours. The upper main-topsail was furled, and she ran faster under three sails and one kite than under Mr. Cott's five. So I reckoned that if I had her pulling for me it was only a matter of mathematics and horse sense to lend her more power. I glanced at Boll, who watched closely.

With the fore-topmast staysail sheeted home flat, and with Little Ahab and another man at the wheel, the *Gerrymander*'s forefeet drove her like a stallion. She reached out for thirteen, fourteen knots, laughing, rocking, rolling a bit, and straining at her sheets. She dipped into waves and out of them, accepting the easy tops and flying spray. She left them behind her, in a twenty-yard patch of foam from her sides, in a wake that danced white into the disappearing night. She roared on, spewing steam under her, whistling and screaming in her rigging, an express on the wet prairie of the roaring forties.

I loved her then. There was something about her that made her a twin to the portrait in the cabin; she and Harriet Adams seemed endowed with the same spirit.

"Mr. Flint," Captain Boll said, "has she another three knots in her? Same wind? Mr. Cott has seen me carry her past eighteen, and he has yet to carry her more than fifteen. Some things aren't learned by the head." He pointed to the pit of his stomach.

The *Gerrymander* reached up as if she wanted to skim off over the waves without touching them; but her one main-topsail held her down. Then her bow would sink down into troughs in a dive; and her foresail held her up. I heard Boll's voice:

"We have topgallants, Mr. Flint."

"They're out of sight," I said, adding under my breath, "And out of mind."

He took over then, and he brought every man aboard into the play. He added sail to her.

"She won't carry all that sail," I said.

"Perhaps not, Mr. Flint. It's just the maximum we're after." As I tried to correlate his words to the canvas, I heard a flapping and booming from up in the main—a topgallant had blown.

The wind grew in force, and the deck, bound tighter to the black-green sea, shipped seas with every dip of her bow. The slaves of the rigging were busy at hard labour; there was no end to their work. They sought foot and hand-holds on treacherous stirrups and slick wet yards. The wind, icy and wet, chilled to the bone and drove tears out of an eye straight back to an ear. Groans and curses went unheard, and bleeding finger tips, when the nails were torn back from sail-handling, went unseen. Boll would have logged any who voiced a desire to quit.

Then an apprentice was knocked off balance by a stubborn sail; the result was a broken collarbone. The lad was Chess.

But Boll had taught us a lesson: the *Gerrymander*, despite her wounds, had driven through rain and sleet squalls to do a good eighteen knots. He was satisfied.

The pace held day after day. We slept in brief stretches, five minutes at a time, on coils, or standing; we worked, a halyard in one hand, a pannikin of coffee in the other. Beards grew, and the apprentices rubbed their fuzzy young faces at times as if suddenly discovering some sign of hairy manhood. The wind blew dry and wet, but cold; it pelleted sail and sail hand with rain, sleet, and hail. The long nights became a terror in the rigging. The wintry sun hid its warmth, until the marrow of our bones felt the chill of a slaughterhouse.

After long days and nights of it, sleep or mutiny seemed inevitable. Lugo staggered on deck with the usual salt beef, coffee, and talk: Mr. Cott was sick! Old Wulsin's normally sad face reminded one of a man about to put the other foot in a grave. There was little evidence of pity for the worthless bosun who shunned his work.

On the eighth day Boll ordered me to the poop. I stood before him, my sea legs wobbly. "Well, it's up to you and me, Mr. Flint."

"Aye," my tongue responded mechanically.

"You'll drive her under all she'll carry through the night."

I turned about, only to meet Chess. I paused, wondering at the strange effect the lad held over me. It was I who had set that cracked clavicle, roughly, and with no more encouragement than, "If you can swear like a young fool, you can take this." He had blanched a bit when I ground his bones together and strapped his shoulders and back with sailcloth.

"I'm dead on my feet, sir, by God and St. Ebenezer I am," he said. "Belay, boy, belay!" I growled. "Go to my quarters and sleep!"

IT was nearing six in the morning when I arrived at my quarters. Chess awaited me there; he slept sitting up, his head against a bunk post, a hand clutching at his collarbone. I stood in silence for a moment, then sat down. The bottle was out of my reach and I debated seriously upon the value of a draught versus the effort of reaching for it. With a heavy sigh, I got up.

As I stood there, the lad ate at my conscience, and I cursed him warmly for his meddlesome invasion. Then I drank deep. The next

I knew I had eased Chess into the bunk and covered him with a blanket.

"Now, Tom Flint, do you feel better?" And Tom Flint replied, "Why should I be an ape for any lad's troubles? He came aboard of his own accord, didn't he?" Something inside me answered: "True, Tom, but you are concerned." Then I dozed off.

Someone was shaking me, and I opened my eyes to see Chess grinning and pointing to hard bread and coffee. "And Little Ahab sent an egg, sir. It's the last one aboard." Thereupon he produced a cold fried egg in the manner of any boy showing a prize frog or grass snake. Then he frowned and said:

"Is this ship really jinxed, sir? Has she always been a hellship?"

I said absently, "There's a parent's curse on her, boy."

"Really?" His eyes leaped up with curiosity before accepting the dismal fact. "Then I wish to hell I'd never signed on."

"Yes, Chess. It goes back to her debut as the *Robert Culver*. That was four years ago. Want to hear it, or had you rather sleep?"

"Sleep here is nothing more than a wink before some fool cries, 'All hands!'!"

"Very well, boy. It was in 'eighty-one—"

At that moment it came: "All hands on deck! Out, every son of a—, on deck!" Mr. Cott's voice rang clearly.

On deck I saw men running up by the forecastlehead, and I made my way forward. It was the bobstay, the stay that held the bowsprit down. I heard Mr. Cott say with a resounding curse, "It's snapped!" It was his first appearance on deck in two days. I lifted my brows at a picture of the bowsprit bending. If it snapped, the fore-topmast would go with it. But there was time to secure it. With every dip the *Gerrymander* shuddered as if in agony. She plunged twice in a couple of ugly seas before Mr. Cott, rubbing his stubble, gave an order to take the sails off her and heave to. The order was that of a brave man, as the case proved. The ship had not a sail fast when Boll came on deck.

"What's the meaning of this, Mr. Cott?"

"The bobstay, sir. The bowsprit will go next," he managed.

"You ran the ship off for that?" Boll said. "You'll put her on her course again and secure it as we go. Pass lengths of stream chain out the hawsepipes and shackle the end to the bowsprit cap. But get under way."

I spoke up: "You want to go on before repairs?"

He turned sharply. "Now."

"Have you looked at the seas?" I said. "Every man here is weary, and you want them to battle the head seas under the bows."

For long moments he stood, a sphinx in deep study of my words or his actions to follow, or both. All the while, the water beat at our weather side and leaped on deck. The ship was almost as mutinous as I in the moment. Boll seemed to be deliberating seriously as to whether I, Mr. Cott, or the elements should be the first to feel his displeasure. He soon decided.

He advanced and sent a short jab to my chin. I went down,

though I was instantly up and counting slowly as I weighed the joy of striking him down against the wisdom of biding my time.

" Why don't you strike back, Mr. Flint ? " he said easily.

" You know why," I said.

" Allow me to compliment you, Mr. Flint." With that he turned on his heel and strode aft.

The man at the lookout strained his eyes for St. Paul late that afternoon, even as a wet sun dripped lazily and bedded down over a grey tumultuous sea before sleep was due. As if to make the deck more than untenable, the wind blew into an antagonistic whole-gale screech before the midnight-to-four watch.

Captain Boll still held to the press of canvas. With topsails ablow, his eyes seemed to contemplate topgallants. His strategy : let her run her best for a couple of hours ; then, if the sea and wind came in stronger and belched up storm, he would ease her off. But, I asked, would he ? Could he then, when the men could not stand the force of the wind up in the rigging, when a foot could find no stirrup ? Boll the Striker was master of the ship, but with a sixty-mile wind the elements would dethrone him.

Boll said, coming up from behind, " We can travel in this weather, Mr. Flint. A good wind," he said slowly, eyeing the murk as if he were mentally engaged in patting the devil's back.

As I stood there, Lugo fetched a bottle. Boll drank, then handed it to me. " You're going to need this, Mr. Flint. Drink deep."

Boll was right—twice right.

My watch wasn't minutes old when the fury of the elements made of the earlier blow a calm by comparison. A terrific gust came in from the west, striking the ship aft. The very suddenness of the blow was something I had never experienced at sea. The *Gerrymander* lurched forward as if all force had struck her topsails to make her dive into the sea. The giant waves, fifty feet high, slapping hard up from behind, caught her stern just as she began to coast down a mountainous wave ; and the gust caused her diving bow to burrow under head-high. The ship twisted and rolled even as she dived and came up, a bobbing cork with more brains and agility than the hungry seas, always a leap ahead of them.

But where the sea failed the wind scored : the upper main-topsail went. Boll bellowed : " Bend a fresh tops'l ! "

As the sail was being sent aloft with a gantline, an apprentice's finger went with a halyard. Then the upper main-topsail slatted, knocking van Buskin, our Dutchman, to the deck. He could not rise ; his back was broken. But that ? Why, that was nothing ; nothing but a human loss ; and to bring the Striker's reasoning abreast of the deed, wasn't the *Gerrymander* driving on ?

I thought I had enough. I turned an eye all round me. Men dripped in salty chills even as they clung to ropes, capstans, ringbolts, and any other solid thing on deck ; water gushed out of the fo'c'sle, swirling about knees and hips ; a few coughed, and one weary lad vomited. I was taking a curious view of the situation—I was thinking of mutiny, and justifying the grave aspect of the word in action.

Above the hiss and roar of the elements I heard the ship's bell sound a warning of the change of watch. I waited the minutes out, then walked to the poop where he stood. My mind was made up. I would see what the other side had to offer.

" Sir," I said evenly, " some time back you said something about making things very interesting for me. Remember ? "

He eyed me slowly, calmly. " Yes," he replied.

" Well, now is the time, sir," I said.

BOLL was quick to oblige me. As soon as he felt the ship safe under Mr. Cott, he led the way to his cabin.

I left the world of deck on the hard open seas and moved into some drawing room, where I sat in a bitter-green leather chair before a polished round table. But Miss Adams of the portrait remained too still. As my eyes drank in the setting, I was aware of a cosy warmth. Some faces make a man think intently, and Miss Adams's face was one of them ; I wondered what was written underneath it.

Boll, seated across the table from me, reproved me with casual indirectness when he said : " That ship in the picture—I'm having a change made in it." I did not ask what or why. " The t'gallants shouldn't be furled in such a small blow," he said.

" Of course not, sir." I chuckled. " Let the wind take them off so the crew will keep busy bending new ones."

" We think alike, Mr. Flint. Uncanny, isn't it ? " He poured from a bottle. We drank.

He opened deviously : " I wonder if Mr. Cott can handle her. He'll no doubt find an excuse to cut a few sheets and reduce her speed. But," he added, his eyes boring into mine, " he's a hard man to provoke into suspension from duty."

" He should take lessons from Tom Flint," I said.

" My thoughts, exactly. He's a necessary factor while running. But "—he paused—" a poor ally for what I have in mind. Oh, he'd be willing enough, but there are other qualities I demand of a first officer in this case." Then he said crisply, " What's on your mind ? "

" I'm here on the behalf of the crew, sir. Nothing personal."

" Naturally," he said, smiling. He was back in his same pose, his hands as motionless and his eyes as steady as those of some pagan statue.

" Unless," I continued, " you wish to take it as personal." He used the word again—" Naturally "—and with intent to infuriate me, I realized. " Go on."

" You're reaching for your eighteen to twenty knots with blood, bone, and agony."

" Is this a formal protest ? "

" Purely private. The crew isn't in on it."

" Too bad," he reflected.

" Purely private," I repeated. " As for myself, I can take it. But those boys out there need sleep."

" The matter is truly serious," he mocked.

I was supposed to lose my temper; I grinned instead. "I've always heard that a captain's worst enemy is a fatigued crew."

He passed the bottle. He held a glass in his hand and his eyes stretched curious seconds into minutes.

"Tom Flint," he said in preoccupied manner. "A good seaman with a good record as mate and captain—good papers, good risk." Then he sat back, exuding a thin smile. "I might overlook the bowline bridle incident on this trip. But don't think I'll forget it.

"Now as you know, Culver owns this ship. He's not in love with her. I am. But he doesn't want to sell her. He wants to drain the last penny out of her. He looks upon her as he would a woman who'd jilted him. He sees that same woman at his mercy. I can imagine how he feels. But that's his pleasure and passion, not mine."

He turned an eye on the three paintings and looked at each for some time. Then he seemed to say everything in five words: "Culver's picture must come down."

I said, looking at the pictures of Harriet Adams and the ship he wanted to run under topgallants, "Just Culver's picture, or frame and all?"

"You have a long eye, Mr. Flint. Maybe you are my man."

"Maybe," I said. "But who's going to paint you in that frame?"

He leaned forward with a question as direct as his eyes: "Are you interested, Mr. Flint?"

There seemed little need of his talking in terms of money or reward; his lofty aims hurdled paltry sums, and by their very omission he offered me much. And I knew he would pay off in gold the same as I knew that one day he would exact his toll in the bowline-bridle affair. I saw the face of De Loach before my mind's eye; he was pleading with me to accept Boll's offer. "It's made to order," he seemed to say.

Then I looked at the face of a girl I had never met. I saw in it some gratifying glimpse of half-conceived dreams, moments of roaming pleasure; then I saw the tears of a wounded ship in her eyes as she gazed at Boll the Striker. I was making up my mind in the wrong direction—then I turned to face the other side of the table. Boll was the stronger attraction.

I was about to answer him when he said, "Ever hear of St. Ebenezer of Singapore?"

I had. St. Ebenezer was an old English trader, ex-professor and actor whom sailors under every flag sought out for a blessing: his touch and word meant good sailing in the stream. His influence was felt in the Orient since he claimed as many religions as he spoke tongues.

"It might interest you to know he's working for me—a little deal in Formosa camphor."

It did interest me. St. Ebenezer was reputed also to play a great confidence game. Just as I formed a question, Boll said:

"You spoke of unrest among the crew."

"Lack of rest, sir," I corrected.

"Let's call it unrest, smouldering mutiny which walks a thin rope. It won't ever quite reach the surface."

"It hasn't the energy," I snapped.

"Are you still championing a noble cause?" he put with mild sarcasm. "This is business, Mr. Flint."

"I'm not selling my insides, sir. Just my services. And I've got my limits even there. Incidentally, what jail do you have in mind for me when I help put your picture in Culver's frame?"

He eyed me for some time. Then he said: "I'm not running for a record to Java Head—which I'll get—for the sake of Culver. I'm doing it for my own very special reasons. But the record: I can see it in the Boston papers: 'Captain Boll of the *Gerrymander* sets new sailing time from Boston to Java Head. He ran her easting down in a record passage—'" He laughed pleasantly; it was the first time I had heard that sound.

"Culver will read all praise of his ship with angered eyes. He'll curse her, and me, for freshening a memory, for flicking at an old sore, one that won't heal. I won't let it. He'll learn something he should remember—a gerrymander has claws."

"But this is all as clear as fog," I replied. "Where do I come in?"

"Your opening rôle should be a very easy one. You seem cut out for the part of the mate who leads a crusade for the rights of the crew. You'll feel for them, you'll get them to send you to me as their spokesman. I'll give a little, but damn little. Then there is talk of mutiny, but you're a sensible man who advises that they keep their heads until we make port, suggesting that they punish me by refusing to sail out with me at the last moment. I'll help in my way, of course."

"It makes good sense up to a point. But why should you want to stir up mutiny and lose a crew?"

"I don't. You'll keep them in line. After delaying the ship in Singapore by a few weeks, in which no other crew will sign on—you'll see to that, too—the men finally come to their senses."

"Why?" I could contain myself no longer. "For what?"

"For the time I'll need to get this rolling."

Thereupon he reached into his pocket and extracted a light yellow disc, which he tossed to the table in front of me: it was a twin to the coin De Loach had given me. I picked it up, frowning, wondering just what scheme he was building around the worthless piece. On one side was a replica of our figurehead in relief; on the other were two words:

GERRYMANDER CASH.

"Consider the value of that," Boll said.

"I'm trying to do just that, sir," I replied, producing the coin De Loach had given me and placing it on the table before him. As he sat up and eyed me sharply, I said, "The man who gave this to me told me to keep it for luck."

Boll smiled. "And riches," he said.

IT was on the following afternoon that Boll came down from the poop and ordered me to follow him. He walked directly to the sail locker and paused before a long box. He eyed it for some time

before removing the black tarpaulin, upon which was printed in big white letters: EXPLOSIVES.

The big black box reminded me of a coffin. It was made of iron, a fact which caused me to lift my brows and think of a broken rule: general precautions in the stowage of explosives advised against the use of iron of any sort. Boll, a stickler for rules, carried explosives of a different kind, I realized.

He produced a key, and soon all three locks were removed. Then he raised the lid. Before me the gold of a dozen pirate treasures glittered. Gold by the peck, though it was false gold, fool's gold, in the shape of yellow coins—Gerrymander Cash pieces.

I glanced at Boll. He eyed the box of spurious wealth with greedy, scheming eyes. Captain Boll, one of the most respected masters of the time, was not the practical, driving captain in that moment; rather, he seemed the lengthened shadow of some great pirate on the Spanish Main.

"Trade money, Mr. Flint," he said. "And enough of it to warrant my bid for time in which to get it in circulation."

"Yeah," I said absently. I was trying to reconcile the venerable captain who reached for a record run to the man who seemed to conspire against a shipowner and ship's crew as he looked far ahead into the blueprint of a baffling scheme. "It's still a puzzle to me, sir." I added, "How can you trade with this?"

"We shall get the answer to that in Singapore—from our partner, St. Ebenezer. He's using Formosa for a testing ground."

"So that's how he fits into the puzzle!"

"Yes. Now, Mr. Flint, you'll get busy with the crew and be sure I get the delay I want in Singapore."

I began work on my insidious hoax shortly after St. Paul snugged under the horizon. I could not but chuckle at a topsy-turvy situation. It was absurd for a captain to desire mutinous swelling on the one hand, and a record run on the other. But the fact remained: they walked hand in hand, and with a promise to serve Amos De Loach and Tom Flint.

Boll played the game. Swinging the *Gerrymander* up into the Australian and equatorial currents, he wore ship from tack to tack night and day. He crowded sail for a record run, though he seemed to court trouble in the rigging just to press the weary men.

Then, not a week after we passed St. Paul, he cut food and water rations. He offered no reason for this unwarranted act. Boll gambled with human emotions as he had gambled with sail in the tophamper. He was a consistent gambler.

Mutiny, I realized, could be a far-off state of mind in one moment, and a crime under way in the next. It was like fire when out of control. Thus I was forced to tread softly, to await the death of fluid curses and the birth of weary sullenness. And Boll helped again when one evening after a day of storm he ordered "below watch" for an hour. His reasoning: private conversations were conducive to swelling.

I eased into the forecastle at nine that evening. Clothes hung everywhere and the smell of sweat joined with that of coffee. The

door opened and sent a paper across the floor and the odours in another swirl. Bunk boards, suitcases, worn books, leather belts, oilskins, shoes, and a maze of assorted gear, from a Bible to prints of Parisian nudes, made a forecastle home. The lamp nestled in the fore-and-aft bulkhead, lighting up the scene.

The babble of voices was suddenly hushed, and I was met with frowns and scowls. " Rather icy in here," I smiled, evoking nothing more than the solid rebuke which lengthened silence can employ. " Yeah, I drove you, lads," I said at last. " But remember this, there was a thumb on my neck."

Then I laughed. " You're a sorry-looking group. Here, help yourselves to the stuff I lifted." I tossed food rolled up in sailcloth to the table ; the tension eased. Then I reversed the situation completely : I sat down and cursed.

I saw the exchange of glances, and in the contained smiles, I felt the flavour of their triumph which, though justified, was nevertheless wicked. Little Ahab cursed : so this was where his salt beef had gone. Did we want the steward to have the captain log him ?

" We don't particularly give a damn," I said, making favour with the boys. Little Ahab rubbed at his ear. " I reckon you had a hand in cutting rations," I growled, causing him to shake his head in a confounded manner. I laughed. It was the cue for all. Amid laughter and jeers, the pugilist in him rose up : he hadn't suggested " nothin' " to the Old Man, and he wasn't about to do so. By God and St. Ebenezer, there was plenty of food and fresh water on board !

Plenty ! That sobered the lads. Simulating surprise, I said, " That doesn't make sense, Little Ahab. Are you playing both sides against the middle ? "

" That settles it," he growled, advancing. Tempted to flash him a wink of an eye, I thought better of it and stood. I noticed the ever-reticent Mr. Blue ease out of his bunk.

" That doesn't settle anything as far as we're concerned," I said stoutly. " If there's plenty of food, you'll take us to it and you'll step willing." A chorus of approval sounded behind me.

" Why, sure—I'm with you." He hesitated. " But—but it's got the smell of mutiny. It's nasty, sir." It was a dazed cook who led us to the store of foodstuffs. " See ? I'm not lyin', lads. Could I ask St. Ebenezer's blessin' if I was a Judas ? I'm one of you, I am, a mug who loves the last damn one of you."

" Then why," piped O'Hare, " are rations cut ? "

" Maybe it's because you boys are getting too fat loafing aboard ship," I put dryly before turning on them. " Lugo's against us. A hell of a steward he is." Of the entire group, only Blue, the confessed criminal, showed no interest.

" Now how many of you have got the guts to follow me to the Old Man's quarters ? Wait ! I'll do the talking. Now while I can't guarantee you won't be logged, I can say you'll feel yourselves men rather than the bunch of shanghaied fools you look."

" By God, I'm with you," cried Chess, provoking me into a step

forward, where I caught his curly hair in a tight fist and said, " Son, your tongue is going to get you into trouble yet ! " The boys were less interested in Chess's profanity and threatened punishment than in the plan afoot. Here was relief from mental doldrums, something to sharpen up the flow of weary blood—they would all go with me.

With my staunch mutineers, I laughed inwardly as I banged at the door of Boll's cabin.

Boll, glancing up after his order to enter, chuckled at what he saw : the boys stood erect, feet planted apart, arms folded across valiant chests, or stuck out akimbo.

" Well ? " Boll smiled.

" I'll speak for them, sir," I said. " It's about the rations. Why are they cut ? "

" Because I ordered it."

" But there's plenty of food and water aboard," I protested. " And as long as you drive the hands watch and watch, I demand full rations."

" Is this a threat, Mr. Flint ? " He spoke to the man whom he had engaged to frame his picture rather than to a foolish champion of dull-witted sailors. Then in a hard voice he said, facing the lads one by one, " I'll increase your rations a little. But you'll work for what you get. Aye. Now get out—all but Mr. Flint."

The boys sent apprehensive and adoring glances my way. I was a man among men, one who had shown the guts to stand up for them before the Striker. I felt a little ashamed.

When the door closed behind them, Boll said, " Nice work, Mr. Flint. St. Ebenezer would appreciate this." He added, pouring drinks, " Now the boys think they've won a victory ; a small one, perhaps, but a point to lift their spirits. They need a jolt now." He meditated aloud, " I must do the unusual here. Call Mr. Cott."

When the first officer stood before him, he said, " Mr. Flint is relieved of his duties until further notice."

BOLL made a mock hero of me. I could only grin and admire the ease with which the cat played with the mice of the crew. If the worst came to pass, open mutiny, there stood Tom Flint, hero, to turn the tide in his favour.

All the while discontent spread like some malignant growth. I was no longer second mate. We were working due east for Java Head when things began to happen.

The wind was strong out of the south-east on that late afternoon ; men laboured and groused as they clawed at sail, dressed spars, sweated down gear, and slaved at a maze of other chores. Mr. Wulsin was drinking heavily ; he was roaming the ship, as if gloating over his position as Boll's favourite, when Little Ahab approached Boll at the poop with a message : van Buskin saw fit to die. The word ran through the ship.

A lad in the sail heard and said, " The captain murdered him." Another replied, " I heard they cut his rations, too. They say the ship

pitched him out of his bunk on his face one day and they let him lay there—him with a broken back."

"Well, I'll be damned! What's Mr. Flint say to that?"

"The usual, 'Bide your time, lads.'"

"Well, I've done bided mine. And Mr. Flint ain't been treated right. He'll join us. You with me, Fritz?"

"Yeah, if the crew is. Pass the word."

The word ran from rigging to deck, and on below.

"Look at old Wulsin! Roamin' around with a gut full of the cap'n's whisky. Let's fix the old buzzard now."

"Lay off the old geezer, O'Brien. He ain't the one we're after. Send for Mr. Flint and let's get organized." It was Reeder, the largest of the lot.

The men from below were on deck against orders, and soon they fell under Mr. Cott's stern eye. His drooping lids tightened, and he was about to leave the poop when O'Brien struck Reeder in the face. That seemed to be the spark that set off the powder.

The wind backed around to the south in the next few minutes, and Mr. Cott ordered a trim of sail. All he received was defiance as the lads in the rigging moved to deck in solid silence.

ON deck I saw the lads of both watches arming themselves with belaying pins, lengths of rope and chain, and other items that assuaged their sense of threat. Mr. Cott stood at the edge of the poop with pistol in hand; his eyes under heavy lids matched his odious leer. He was contemplating murder and steeping his mind to the joys of it.

His eyes fell upon me as I elbowed my way through the massing throng. "Stay where you are, Mr. Flint. It's your doing, and I'll take the leader first."

"Put down that gun, sir," I barked. "The situation calls for brains."

"One more step and the deck'll get yours," he replied. The manner in which he licked his lips suggested his dead seriousness. As I taxed my slow mind for some means of saving the situation, I saw the bloody face of O'Brien drawing a bead on the mate over a short pistol. I reached out and pushed the gun down, drawing for my pains a curse.

"You want to hang, O'Brien?" I said.

"Just which side are you on?" he growled.

"Yeah, we thought you'd make us a good captain, Mr. Flint," growled Reeder close behind me. "Yeah, which side are you for?" a dozen voices clamoured.

I raised my voice. "Listen, you pack of fools! Is this the gratitude I get for standing up for your rights? So you'd make me captain—captain of what? The first gallows, that's what! The law is against you. Why is it against you? Because Captain Boll hasn't done enough to justify mutiny."

All about me hate was taking a cumulative effect. At Boll's suggestion, and with his help, I had stirred up something which I

could no longer control. Threats rose in a babble, evaporated in a hot south wind, and in the rain which began to fall in hard drops. I moved forward until I stood on the ladder, under the eye and pistol of Mr. Cott. Then I faced them.

I yelled, "Who'll you send to the poop for a conference?"

"It's a trick! He's not on our side! Get him—get Flint!"

Reeder felt complaisance due; he possessed the temerity to lay a hand on my shoulder. I enjoyed the solid crack of my fist against his chin. He crumpled.

From above came Mr. Cott's voice: "Nice work, Flint. Come on up here."

"Only if you put that gun away."

Then I felt a hush as I faced the men, a silence in the mob born of awe or inculcated respect. Boll came to the poop.

"I suggest you humour our second, Mr. Cott." He said it with deadly calm, and when I sent him a glance, I saw his easy smile. He had reinstated me as second mate with a mere word. Not a voice lifted as he moved forward and disarmed Mr. Cott. He tossed the pistol to the crowd. Then he said contemptuously:

"I'd enjoy flogging every last one of you." The truth was lifted to its pinnacle by his lack of emphasis. "Perhaps I shall," he added, "after I've set a record to Java Head." He stood there a full minute. He seemed to have broken the back of that threat.

At a time when Boll stood aft counting the minutes necessary to splicing cut sheets, trimming sail, and riding to the tide, I found myself faced with a crew which slowly shook off the effect of Boll's eye and words. I moved down among them, grinning out a bid for their good will, cursing them even as I did so.

"You pack of idiots! Now wouldn't he laugh to see you sitting before a judge who spits out a verdict—'I sentence you to hang for mutiny on the high seas.' Boll would enjoy seeing you squirming on the bench, toiling in some penitentiary, or swinging by your necks from a rope furnished by the law."

Under the weak deck lamps the men posed a fantastic study in facial expressions; a problem in restlessness, sadness, frustration, and anger. One man of twenty-two cried like a baby, while another youngster in his teens beat the deck with a belaying pin. They hated me for my words, and at the same time they felt the truth of them. It is a part of the drama of mutiny seldom told. I talked on:

"Yeah, I'm sorry I ever tied up with you. I steal you food, and you snap at my hand like a kennel of mongrels. I stand up for your rights and you throw me over."

When I had finished—I advised against any foolish uprising, suggesting that we even the score later by refusing to sail under Boll out of Singapore—the men had quietened.

But I was unaware of the working of adolescent minds—they were that, and bent on vandalism. The plan to desert the captain just when he was ready to sail from port appealed to their practical sense of justice, though it in no way served to appease the storm of vengeance they had brewed within themselves. I felt more secure when they

scattered slowly, moving off in groups.

The *Gerrymander* moved into the Bay of Balimbing with the wind abeam; Boll himself stood at the wheel. He handled it like a Dutch pilot, and we moved in slowly to anchorage in seven fathoms on the north-east side of the island. It was humid and hot, but it was land, and the breeze was alive with the warm, sweet scents of tropical vegetation.

It was no more than a minute after we dropped anchor when the unappeased mutineers brought their scheme into play. Boll was busy at the wheel, and I was forward when I sensed something wrong.

O'Hare and eight others, including Reeder and Chess, entered the sail locker where Boll kept his big iron coffin-like box labelled: EXPLOSIVES. They lifted it like pallbearers and moved with all the speed the weight of the box would allow to the port beam. There they hoisted it and sent it splashing overboard before any active interference could be brought into play.

It made little difference in the final outcome that Boll, in the minutes that followed, had each of the culprits lowered with ropes under their arms almost to the water, where hungry sharks espied them and moved ever closer; that he kept them there for a good hour begging for the mercy of a flogging on deck. The work of the lads had been done.

Thousand upon thousands of Boll's trade coins—the balance of power in the great Gerrymander Cash scheme in months to come—had been dumped in seven fathoms near a little offshore island, the name of which was Little Fortune!

SOME days later we anchored in the inner roads of Singapore. Here we would meet St. Ebenezer and learn the value of the Gerrymander Cash in Formosa.

The routine of port entry was no sooner done with than Boll paid Culver's agent a visit. I went along and met Mr. Ruscomb, a slow-talking, calculating man with more polish than directness. He asked of our passage and spoke of the sailing record with such marked casualness that one might think records were made daily in his world. He spoke of a huge shipment of gum camphor from Formosa.

He added, "It's odd, Captain, odd as hell. I have, of course, reported it to Mr. Culver. He should have already received my report."

There was something strange, rather ill-omened, in Boll's "Naturally."

Ruscomb continued to smile with assurance as he lifted his brows and said, "Mr. Flint is the second on board, isn't he?"

Boll replied slowly, "He's chief mate as of right now." I poled a cheek with my tongue and lifted my brows in unison with Mr. Ruscomb, who seemed about to lapse from professional decorum. "You can talk," Boll added crisply.

"There's little to talk about." Our host smiled, eyeing me closely.

"Then," Boll said, "why tack off your course to the subject of camphor?"

"Because, Captain, the cargo is consigned to a Mr. Teale, Boston address. Mr. Culver will like that." He smiled, and I started. Why had Boll openly allied himself with the old figurehead carver?

"Mr. Culver *won't* like that," Boll corrected.

"No," Ruscomb said thoughtfully, his eyes on the seething bund of Singapore. "No, he won't, any more than he'll like another phase of the affair." He turned to face Boll once more. "The whole thing has a picaresque flavour, Captain; and St. Ebenezer's part in it makes it stink. As we both know, Mr. Culver is interested only in the *Gerrymander*'s earnings, and nothing more. He will not approve your record run because of the publicity involved—or shall we say notoriety?

"Therefore, knowing our man, we must both admit it is foolish to assume that he would strike metal replicas of the figurehead which caused him embarrassment in the past.

"Naturally the valueless coins smack of wool-pulling over the eyes of the Chinese, who own Formosa. The Government could prosecute, but—"

Boll said the rest, "The Chinese will get around to that some time in the next century."

Ruscomb said gravely, "Mr. Culver is less dilatory, Captain. Mr. Culver can relieve you of your command." He snapped his fingers, adding, "Like that."

Boll arose as if bored, and smiled. "I'll wager a thousand dollars that he won't."

PROCTOR'S Pub, just off the bund, hummed like a main deck, the bar the poop. The smell of the sea, the scream of the gulls, blended with Eurasian girls and curtained booths, the steam of Proctor's liquors doing the work of an undulating sea. The mahogany bar under oil lamps shone like the mirror, like Proctor's hairless head; the fat nudes in frames around the walls were alternately spaced with oils of ships and schooners, as if each vessel sailed at the behest of its favourite woman. At the tables sat sailors, traders, ship chandlers, Chinese merchants, tea planters, silent Moslems in tarboosh and turban sipping at nonalcoholic drinks, Malay boatmen, and the spawn of the crossroads of the East. "A monkey for five shillings, tuan? He trim sail." "A flower for your girl, tuan?" Hawkers came and departed, as did thieves and pimps. But Proctor's Pub, layered with smoke and smelling of lamp oil, swill, disinfectant, and warm blood spilled over some chattering woman, went on day and night, quiet and deserted almost until the sunset squall from over Sumatra way ushered in a riotous, lawless evening, as sensual as it was salty.

Boll and I were to meet Mr. Wulsin and St. Ebenezer there. We arrived at about nine on our third evening at anchorage. As we stepped from a ricksha, Boll tossed the coolie a Gerrymander Cash piece and stood by for his reaction; the Chinese fingered it, bit it,

smiled, and moved on. "A good omen," said Boll.

The curtain of a booth at the rear closed behind us and I made ready to meet the vaunted St. Ebenezer. I had anticipated this meeting for some time. He was as interesting as the East; he seemed a sort of symbol of its culture, schemes and evil.

I saw a man of perhaps sixty, long-haired, short-bearded, both yellow-white; he was wide of eye: dreamy, distant, soft brown eyes in one moment, slitted, cunning eyes in the next. Certainly he had adventured, and heavily; and equally as sure was his propensity for doing just that until he died. He had the air of some great scholar or prophet—perhaps his pale skin and ethereal eyes, the hair about his shoulders, as well as his long classically beautiful hands, had something to do with it.

Instead of shaking my hand, he touched his forehead with relaxed fingers and leaned forward with eyes closed. A blessing in disguise, I thought, chuckling inwardly. Before I seated myself, Proctor came over.

"Two sailors departing for Hong Kong, St. Ebenezer," he said. The "saint" nodded, and soon two big Swedes stood close, their caps off, their faces sober with respect above their swaying bodies. Each handed him a handful of coins and stood with bowed heads.

St. Ebenezer stood and said in a beautiful liquid voice, "May the Lord bless you with fair sailing, and luck. St. Ebenezer said it." The men bowed and moved on, and the same arresting voice said, "Dutch gin, Proctor, a quart." Then he counted the coins with a speculative eye and fell back into his normal pose.

Old Wulsin beamed; here was his hero.

"Business—down to it, gentlemen," St. Ebenezer said almost wistfully, downing an ounce of straight gin. "Let us review what I have accomplished with an eye to the future. You there, Finn, Flinn, or Flint, whatever the name, sir, tell Proctor I'm in conference. Don't wish to be disturbed." As I arose to humour him, he added importantly, "St. Ebenezer said it."

A score of seamen stood patiently on the other side of the curtain, each waiting his chance to touch the hand of a good-luck piece in human form. More arrived as I talked to Proctor. "I heard St. Ebenezer was here," each said, peering about the place. Proctor eyed them and soon prevailed upon the "saint's" graciousness. I wondered at the old man's influence, how he came by it. When he sat down in the curtained booth once more, he said:

"Flint? Flint? 'Tom Flint! Captain Boll, you're sure of him? In the voyage of life I see him as captain, not lieutenant. I'll have your yes or no—for exonerating purposes if the need should arise." When Boll nodded, he smiled at me, saying, "A matter of form you'll excuse, Tom Flint. I'll bless any man, though I'll look deeper when I do business with him. Flint's in the fold," said St. Ebenezer. "Mr. Flint has a profound respect, I am sure, for pound, dollar, or guilder."

"Or cash piece," I added, causing the old boy to raise a glass in salute.

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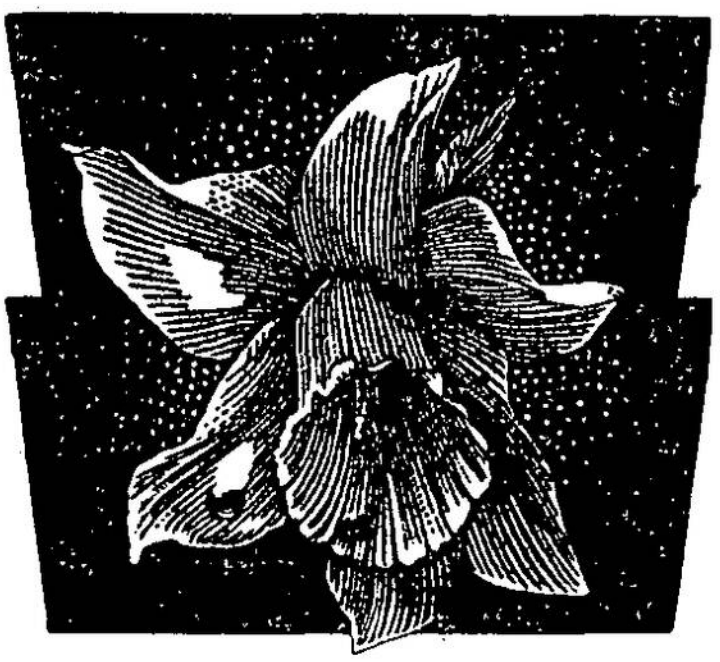

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"It is regrettable that your crew tossed the box overboard, Captain," St. Ebenezer remarked thoughtfully. "Now I can tell you why a Moslem won't eat pig or drink alcohol, or how a head-hunter in Borneo spends his wedding night, but in the co-ordination of my mental skills, I've not the slightest damned idea how one would go about striking a coin. But I suppose that is why Mr. Wulsin, the bosun, is sitting here among us." And Mr. Wulsin, floating in a blissful state of cosiness, accepted the left-handed compliment and asked for tools and material. I eyed him with a world of misgiving as I sought to reconcile a worthless bosun to a striker of coins. It was Boll's idea, however, so nothing was said about it.

"I can use ten thousand cash pieces at once," St. Ebenezer said. He spoke of Indo-China and the slow French, of the Celebes and the grasping Dutch. "The lack of money in circulation is boon nature. The laws of economics smile on the Gerrymander Cash."

He turned a sharp eye on Boll. "Now I went to Formosa," he said, causing me to sit up with freshened interest. "As you know, Captain, you asked for camphor, not caring whether it came from hell or heaven.

"I had ten thousand of our cash pieces, the sample lot you left me, Captain. With the aid of a Presbyterian missionary from Indiana, with whom I discussed some nine religions over his tea and my gin, I set about to learn the desires of not only the Chinese but the head-hunters.

"He accompanied me inland, south for some sixty miles, with a Chinese escort. Beautiful country—camphor trees, bamboo thickets, and God's mountains raising their purple shoulders to the white snowy heavens, while below banana and orange groves, as wild as the land; stretched down to virgin rivers. 'The rock of ages,' I said, peering up into the cloud-fringed crags, 'since the *rock* is, after all, one's conception of God's whereabouts.'

"The missionary, a practical man, was eyeing the bush as I said it. He replied, 'Yes, St. Ebenezer, and we may attain it, literally. We're surrounded by head-hunters.'

"We were escorted to a village by the savages. They were tall men part Indonesian, Melanesian, and Mongol. Imagine a fiercer blood. Spears, bows and arrows, long, ugly knives, together with their tattooed faces and hungry eyes, caused us to listen for the last notes from Gabriel's trumpet. That night we saw a hideous tribal dance. Poles supported trophies—skulls!—and the general idea among them was to add a few more. The moon was up and full, and stone houses and thatched roofs, as well as the banana jungle and camphor trees all around, caught the hellish pale light.

"I saw them sever the head from the body of one of our Chinese guards. It was very simple—an agony of fear, the stoical suppression of a scream, the spouting of blood in the moonlight, a face reacting in twitches to the shock of it, a body jerking convulsively, and stillness. It was quick. Then the head was placed on a fresh pole, and the dance around it began. Then they fed the face on the pole, and they brought it water to drink. They humoured it, trying to rid it of sorrow.

"Skulls meant prosperity! Economics again. Think of the

Gerrymander Cash in the same light, if you can."

I was no longer in Proctor's Pub. Mr. Wulsin's belch, Boll's flat hand on the table, his cap on the back of his head, its peak as sharp as his nose, the bottles between four connivers, all were in some moon-splashed highland village two thousand miles away. Behind the mist of a turquoise mountain lay mystery fathomed by a self-confessed saint. He talked on in beautiful voice; he lent blood-spilling a poetic vigour, did this luck charm of the Far East.

"Skulls meant prosperity," he reflected. "How very primitive is our civilization by comparison.

"The tribesmen danced on in a wide circle. Frenzied, one would drop out of line, reappear with his wife at the edge of a clearing, and bless her with his virility. Their social life revolved about us.

"The missionary suggested that we sing 'Rock of Ages.' We did; and I, suddenly inspired, grabbed his hand, and we joined the dancing group, shouting our song at the top of our voices. The shock was then theirs; and when all of the apes stood still, I passed out the Gerrymander Cash pieces until my pockets were empty.

"The next day they cut camphor trees, and the chips were cooked for gum camphor in huge iron kettles they'd stolen from captured Chinese over the years. Two days later we, gods of the distance who would return, left them.

"We did return a month later with every trinket that fifty pounds would buy in the port town. There I did this—listen, Captain . . .

"I bought crude gum camphor with cash pieces, and I sold them the trinkets for the same cash pieces. It was their first experience with money. They liked it. Yes, they liked it so well that when we were ready to depart they advanced menacingly on us—gods, mind you—and robbed me of every cash piece." He laughed, then grew sober. "And the last object to meet my eye when I left was a gruesome one.

"The Chinese we'd seen beheaded was skull up on a pole, and between his teeth, which they'd pried open, was a round gleaming Gerrymander Cash."

WULSIN winced, and I poured a drink. The "saint" said, "Now will that rest well on your stomach or mind, Captain?"

"I smell camphor," Boll replied. "Suppose you finish your tale." I could see respect in St. Ebenezer's face. "How did you clear port, and how did Ruscomb learn about the cash?"

"As I said, I could have left Formosa flooded with Gerrymander Cash pieces. The English paid off in shillings and the Chinese cash, damn few of either. So with our money popular, camphor came in crude and refined, honestly, as well as by theft from the warehouses.

"I borrowed five hundred dollars from the missionary. I moved to Hong Kong for supplies. Chopsticks, fans, shoes, kimonos, and such, I bought sparingly. I put the money to better use with old duck eggs, *bêches-de-mer*, shark fins, lotus seeds for soup, idols, English parasols, and a maze of gewgaws. These I sold for the Gerrymander Cash, which I'd recently spent in buying up camphor.

"Thus the cash piece had an established value."

Boll asked, "The total cost of the venture was what?"

St. Ebenezer extended a tallied sheet and said, "Considering the camphor alone, the cost was about twenty-two cents on the dollar against the market price in Formosa."

"Where's the profit?" I asked. "Forgetting the cash pieces, wouldn't the five hundred dollars' worth of gewgaws have turned the trick?"

"My dear Tom Flint!" St. Ebenezer said with lofty condescension. "Any trader who does business with the Chinese will tell you you'll do well to double your money."

Boll said, "Consider the value of that, Mr. Flint." Then he turned on our "saint" and said gruffly, "Now about Ruscomb. He claims reason for the Chinese Government to prosecute. What was your error, and how did he know about it?"

"He had a man up there for tea. And my error, if any was made, is that some two thousand of our cash pieces are still in circulation."

"An error can be beautiful." Boll smiled. "But you said, 'considering the camphor alone.' Now just what else did you bring?"

"Oh, that! Sometimes the activity of the tongue lends the mind a feeling of inadequacy, Captain. I often swear I'll expel gin from my diet. However, I brought opium for those who enjoy hitting the pipe."

"From camphor to opium," chuckled Wulsin. "Damn me for a poor bosun if that ain't mixin' the smells into paregoric!"

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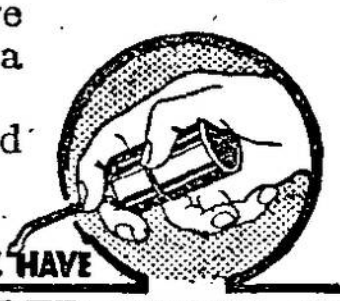

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Boll's reply seemed typical of the man when he quoted the ancient writer, Juvenal: "The smell of gain is good from any source."

THE *Gerrymander*, impervious to the doing of her master and mate, sat out days in the roads at steamy, sweaty, squally anchorage; wandering sampans, lighters, and junks floated by, their destination unknown in an equatorial lapping of the seething Strait of Singapore.

Boll sent for me one day at sunset. St. Ebenezer lay stretched out on the silk divan, hands folded across his chest. Boll eyed me, at last breaking his silence with: "Mr. Ruscomb has contracted cargo for Hong Kong." He paused for thoughtful silence, then said:

"Now about the crew, Mr. Flint. Your work is cut out for you."

The job ahead of me called for precision balancing in a play with the emotions of the crew. Boll had wanted time in which to motivate his cash pieces into action; though that was before the crew dumped them at Little Fortune Island. Now he needed time in which to strike another supply.

"It might be well for you to bend an elbow in the fo'c'sle," he added. "There's whisky in the chest 'tween decks."

As I nodded and stood to go, Boll said, "The crew is above the ordinary, Mr. Flint. I want to keep it in the end." He added a surprise when he said, "You realize the men rebelled because our ex-chief mate held a pistol on them."

I saw the light: Boll, with no excuse to relieve Mr. Cott of his duties, was creating reasons that would minimize even Culver's intervention on his behalf. The crew would serve the captain once more.

In the weeks that followed, I rose to the task assigned me with all the artistry of a misanthropic genius, despising the work with a passion. If any ship's officer had ever before toyed with a crew's mind in such manner I have yet to learn of it. In brief, they refused to sail to Hong Kong, and I advanced them pay, out of Boll's purse, for their lodging in Singapore—in order to prevent their signing aboard other ships—under the pretext of getting a better deal for all. Thus I managed to hold them intact.

In the meantime, for the benefit of the log, we ran crew after crew of sailors aboard the *Gerrymander*. Each remained for only a short time, always departing before the fictitious sailing date. They heard that the *Gerrymander* was a hellship—another part of my work.

Mr. Cott had not been informed of his discharge, though he suspected some breach in his relations with Boll. It was vague in his incredulous mind, though it was there. All the while, Boll, together with St. Ebenezer and old Wulsin, secured an old lever coining press. The dies completed, the old press spewed out a new supply of the Gerrymander Cash. Then, at Boll's signal, I turned my influence once more on the crew, blaming everything that had happened on Mr. Cott: he had a flair for brutality; I said it was he who had asked that rations be reduced; it was he who had wanted to empty his pistol into the hungry crew during the uprising.

At last they agreed to ship under Boll—provided Tom Flint was made first officer. They wanted Mr. Cott dismissed.

Boll mustered them on deck one day, resorting to mild dissuasion: "Mr. Cott meant no harm." The crew was adamant, however, and Boll said, "I'll consider your demands on one condition, that you put them in writing and affix your signatures to the document."

He waited with the text of the petition ready for me, and before ten that night the last man of them had filed in to sign his name to as big a lie as any mortal ever read.

A half-hour later Boll sent for Mr. Cott, who had been absent, at Boll's order, that afternoon. He entered, tense, a curious twisted smile on his cavernous face; he hesitated as his drooping eyes swept the four faces which sent pitiless and expressionless eyes into him; he must have felt the breath of unhealthy judgment due in the moment, and by that rapid mental association of cause and effect, there is small doubt that he knew a flurry of guilt, deserved or not.

"Sit down, Mr. Cott," said Boll. When the mate draped himself to a chair, Boll extended the signed petition and asked, "What's the meaning of this?"

Then, "A drink, Mr. Cott?" he said nicely, extending bottle and glass. But Mr. Cott was busy with a worded sentence which he knew would call for a verdict:

We, the members of the crew of the Gerrymander, appeal to the sense of justice which the captain has always exhibited on our behalf— Even the wording was above the level of any of the sailors; and the essence! Mr. Cott read on, his face twisting into anger packed with slow shock: *Unknown to you, we were served victuals unfit for human consumption and we suffered in silence under threat of irons or flogging in the holds.* Mr. Cott raised his face and gazed malevolently at me for some time. I noticed he did not face Boll. He poured a drink with hands shaking, ran his tongue over his upper teeth, and drank. *The cook as well as the boatswain and second will attest to the above. There is also the matter of Mr. van Buskin's death, which Mr. Cott brought about by criminal negligence when he forced our deceased shipmate into the tophamper during the severest blow of our voyage.*

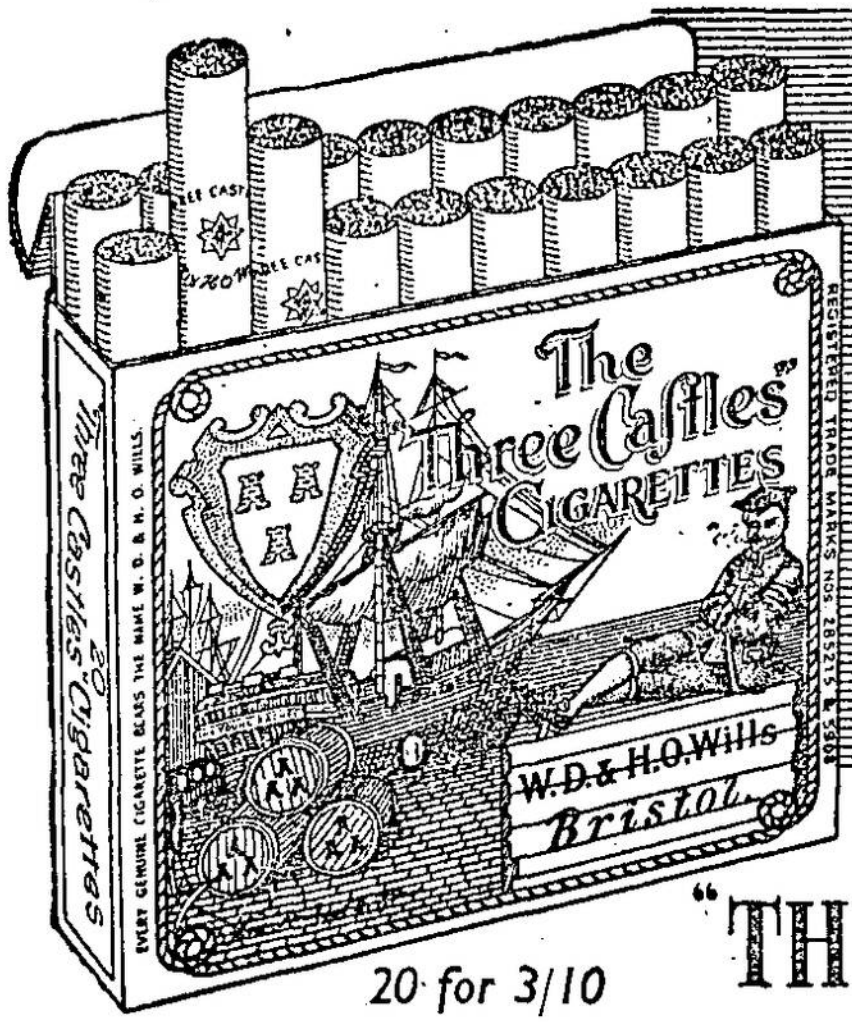
Mr. Cott breathed jerkily and shook all over. Another stiff drink settled him somewhat. "I've read enough," he said. "The blackest lies that were ever written, sir."

"Surely, Mr. Cott," Boll said, as if weighing denial against charge, "such accusations are not without some foundation."

"Right." The mate laughed evilly. "They name the wrong man, and you know it; and they didn't write that, not our crew." Boll mentioned the signatures and asked if Mr. Cott denied any guilt. "Sir," came the whining answer, "you know I've served you well for years. What are you doing to me?"

"I, Mr. Cott?" Boll said, meeting his eyes squarely. "I tried to talk the crew out of this today, as any of the men will tell you. Let's put it the other way round. It seems you're trying to hand me a crewless ship. Is that the way to serve me?"

"But it's not true. You—I didn't—" As if sensing the utter futility of words, he searched each of our faces; but we met his glances with pitiless eyes. "You, Flint, you're to blame for this!"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he said angrily. " You framed me." I said nothing as I continued to bore him with silent eyes. He talked on, whining, almost crying, blowing out his cheeks, and wiping his nose on his wrist, as he purged himself of growing anger and injury. But not a man of us said a word after that ; we merely sat like patient hangmen, each with a cold, lazy reflection of a gallows in his eyes. Then Mr. Cott babbled out questions in defence of self ; his mutterings seemed evoked more by the strain of silence rather than the false charges of the crew. We used him up, we let him burn on his own mental kindling. The effect was worse than that of any whip.

" I'll get even," he cried. " There's plenty Mr. Culver would like to know." He moved to the door, shaking like a man in the throes of a hard chill.

A long heavy silence hung over the room after his departure. To myself I said, " Mr. De Loach, I wonder if the partnership is worth the rôle I'm forced to play." Slowly the four of us eyed each other, our faces working into grins.

" The ways of the Lord are strange," St. Ebenezer said.

Boll added, " And the way of the transgressor is hard."

" We're due for weather," Mr. Wulsin said.

Some light remark was expected from me, though I was busy trying to fathom Mr. Wulsin's prediction : did he mean the elements or, worse, mighty retribution ? I glanced at our audience on the wall. Mr. Culver remained impassive, and the ship seemed in no greater danger than before, but Harriet Adams !—it was there I met with surprise an expression I had never seen before.

Her eyes were as straightforward as usual, though they seemed filled with accusation and temper ; she aimed them at me ! Illusions ? I thought not. I jerked my head towards Boll, who at that moment said : " Good riddance is gain, and—

" The smell of gain is good from any source."

I drew the sharp eyes of St. Ebenezer and Boll when I said with a slow, tight grin, " No matter the stench."

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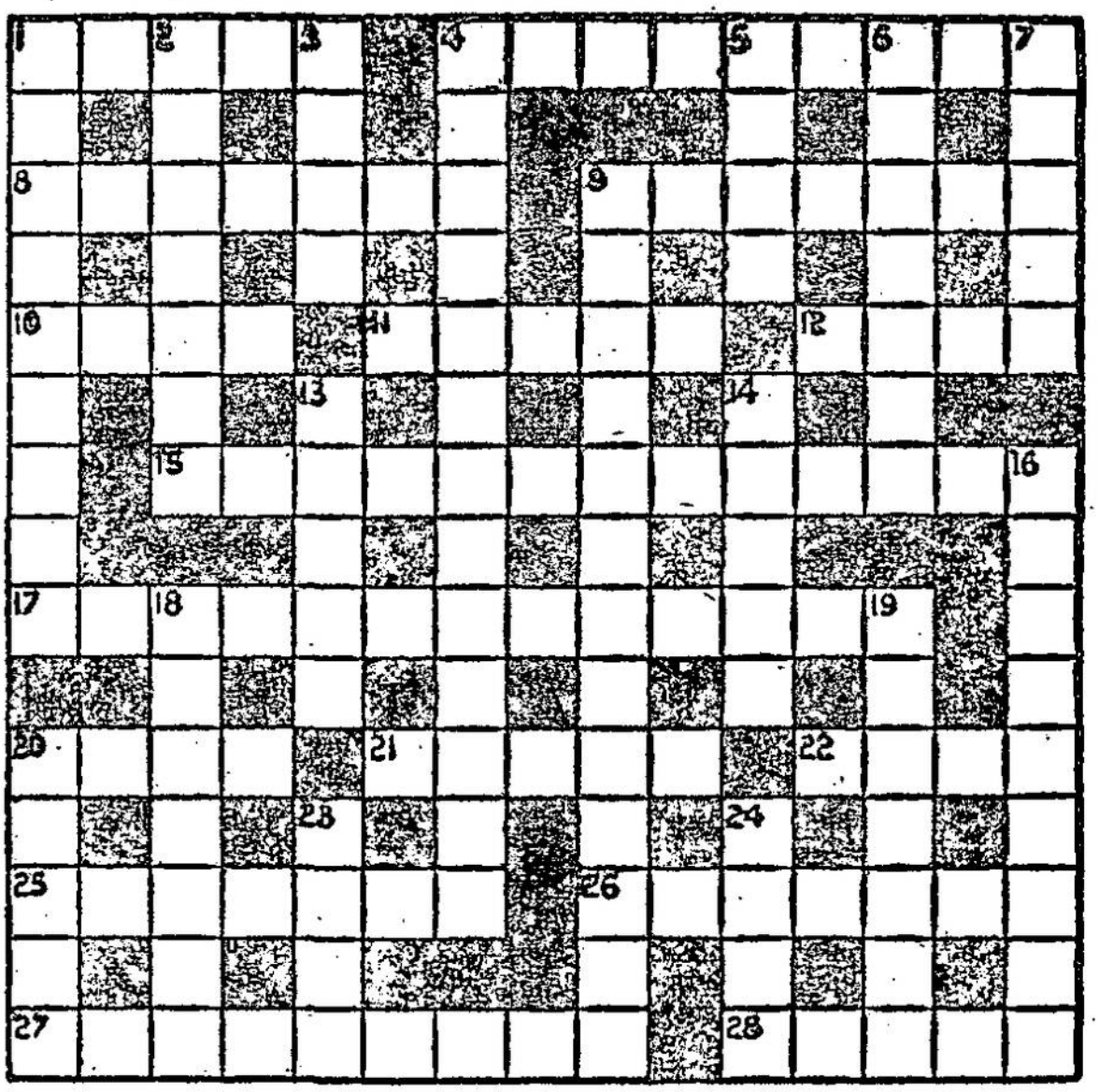
Solution on page 117



CLUES

Across

1 Opened wide with the opening first (5).

4 The inventor must have had a pet reason for fashioning this language (9).

8 He "sees more devils than vast hell can hold" (7)

9 Was it his portrait thus done that gave anything but pleasure to little Edward ? (7).

10 Mother of Old Father Thames ? (4).

11 "Western wind, when wilt thou blow, The — rain down can rain ?" (*Anon.*) (5).

12 This brook is in Kent, but does it contain so many fish ? (4).

15 She may see a dark stranger (7, 6).

17 Belief in this was a hobby of the White Queen (13).

20 Is made from skin and can hold water (4).

21 Ungodly result of giving father a turn-tail steed (5).

22 Stuff,—or may involve haste to pass examinations ! (4).

25 In M.I.5 ? Or a job for the plumber's mate ? (7).

26 Ape, — but nothing hairy about it ! (7).

27 Any schoolboy will tell you this was invented for keeping the young in (9).

28 To murmur to one's inner self is so dampening (5).

Down

1 A famous peninsula (9).

2 A quarrel was the end of this cleric (7).

3 A fruit of everyday significance (4).

4 Only a 2 down could thus punish (13).

5 Damping reference to an artist's success at election ? (4).

6 It seems somehow quite all right to find an ancient city of Asia in a province of Africa (7).

7 "Laugh and be merry : remember, in — time, God made Heaven and Earth for joy He took in a rhyme" (*John Masefield*) (5).

9 Reduction to the finest of results (13).

13 The motorist who is this beheaded is asking for it all (5).

14 Start to be a spirit (5).

16 Introduce favourably, and end finally (9).

18 A hanging affair (7).

19 Suitably sized limb to spar with ? (4-3).

20 Thus the covering is substantial (5).

23 "To the stack or the — door, Stoutly struts his dames before" (*John Milton*) (4).

24 The dog laughed as this eloped with a piece of cutlery (4).

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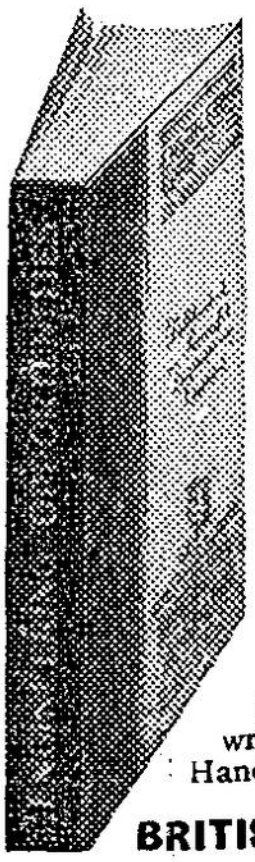

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